Joyce E. Salisbury

Rome's Christian Empress

Galla Placidia Rules at the Twilight of the Empire

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JOYCE E. SALISBURY

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For
Lydia Hillesheim
My Spectacular Granddaughter

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A Forgotten Empress

In 410, the unthinkable happened: the Eternal City of Rome was sacked by barbarian Goths. They kidnapped Princess Galla Placidia, Emperor Honorius's sister, and held her hostage. How could an emperor let his sister be captured? Then, in 449, an almost equally unthinkable event occurred. Placidia's daughter, Honoria, proposed marriage to the leader of the empire's greatest enemy, Attila the Hun. What possessed a Christian daughter of Rome to propose to a polygamous pagan invader?

Dynamics within families often shape the histories of empires and how, for better or worse, mothers sometimes become role models for their daughters. I often look back with wonder at women who managed to come to power against all the weight of tradition and society's expectations of their inadequacy.[1] What in their experience allowed them to overcome such odds? While each story is a bit different, all women (and men, too, for that matter) begin their paths to greatness within the small circle of their families. The personal is indeed political, and Placidia's story shows how decisions made within a household could have major political ramifications and how sometimes smart women could take advantage of strange turns of luck and sometimes they couldn't.

Placidia was an impressive and significant ruler. She had intelligence, an indomitable will, and political instincts that let her navigate swift changes in fortune throughout her life. She managed to thrive during the turbulent twilight of the Roman Empire when many prominent people did not survive. Furthermore, she ruled during the years when the official Roman Catholic Church was establishing its buildings, holidays, church services, and a theology that shaped all future Christian ideas. As Placidia ruled on her own for twenty years, the Roman world changed dramatically. The Roman Empire became a Christian empire,

and barbarian tribes settled throughout the West, changing the old Roman culture. This book explores these transformations and the empress's role in them as they unfolded. Traditionally, historians have given little credit to women rulers, diminishing their impact and losing their stories. However, the changed empire that emerged in the fifth century was shaped by Placidia's guiding hand, making her tale well worth remembering.

Historians—both ancient and modern—writing about the fourth and fifth centuries have tended to choose one of two paths to follow in their recreation of this complicated time, and these traditional approaches have made it more likely for Placidia to fall into footnotes, if she appears at all. Many historians have focused on military history, writing about barbarians and Romans clashing on the battlefields, and those authors have explored the military strategies that generals developed to hold back the tide of invaders before the West was overwhelmed.[2] Such accounts play down or eliminate the role of the empress, highlighting instead her powerful generals who fought the battles. Other historians and theologians have traced the development of the Catholic Church as it was first splintered by disagreements and heresies and then shaped by theologians slowly building the body of belief that formed the basis for today's Christianity.[3] In these narratives of the progression of religious ideas developed by Church fathers, there seemed little room for an account of a ruling woman.

In contrast, I suggest that Placidia influenced both battles and theology. She hired the generals and played one against another to keep herself in power. In doing this, she influenced the battles they fought and the compromises they made. The empress was even more influential when it came to religious developments. Her father, Theodosius, had declared Christianity the official religion of the empire; he claimed that, in return, God blessed his dynasty. His action was central to Placidia—and the other Theodosian empresses—claiming power. Unlike her father, Placidia did not lead armies, but she did something more important: she claimed to bring God's blessings to the empire. Therefore, when she engaged in correspondence with theologians of the day, she could not help but influence the stands they took. Even popes sought her patronage. For example, Pope Leo threw himself weeping at her feet to solicit her help in resolving a theological conflict. Augustine might not have developed his ideas about God's purpose in history in his majestic *City of God* had barbarians not sacked Rome and kidnapped Placidia. Councils debating the role of the Virgin Mary in the incarnation might have come to a different conclusion had an empress not been on the throne. Politics, religion, and the role of the empress intersect at many points in the story of a woman who believed she ruled because God was on her side.

Placidia also had a longstanding influence because she recognized the importance of art and architecture in shaping public opinion. She spent fortunes on building churches and contracting mosaic artists to place herself and her family prominently in church artwork. Like many visitors to Ravenna, I became curious about Galla Placidia while admiring the glowing mosaics in the jewel-box chapel that's called her mausoleum. (I later discovered that the chapel is not her burial place but a remnant of a larger church that she commissioned.) There was something in this chapel—an expression of holiness combined with power and confidence—that made me wonder about the patron who built the church and hired the artists. Mosaics she commissioned in other churches in Ravenna and Rome articulated a view of imperial power and heavenly reward that influenced Christians long after her lifetime.

In addition to politics, warfare, theology, and art, I trace another important historical thread that runs through this story: the blending of cultures as Romans and barbarians began to share the land. Placidia exerted a strong influence on her first husband, her barbarian captor. Ancient chroniclers wrote little about the important accommodations that people made as these two cultures merged, so I have tried to use other evidence to relate details of daily life that show the slow changes that moved the Roman West into the medieval one. Everything in the past (and the present for that matter) is connected in some way.[4] The things people use influence the way they think, so matters like the appearance of eunuchs in the Roman court and changes in court clothing affected and revealed overall changes in society. Consequently, I have included them here. Furthermore, having a woman rather than a man at the center of this web of things, ideas, and people made a difference to how events progressed.

There is little direct information about Placidia's childhood, so I recreate it by looking at contemporary texts discussing the education of girls, and I examine the experience of her brothers. I did not want to skip over her youth because I believe that in that upbringing lay the seeds of the ruler she would become. I end the story after her death, tracing the fortunes of her children and grandchildren, for most of her efforts later in life had to do with establishing their futures. Thus, my account begins in 379, a few years before her birth, and ends in 455, five years after her death; it encompasses the critical years of the twilight of the Roman Empire and the formative years of the Christian Church. I've added a short epilogue on the fall of the western Roman Empire in 476 to round out the story.

The sources from this period are surprisingly rich, given that they come from such a turbulent time. They include chronicles relating political events, theological tracts detailing changing religious ideas, and letters—mostly from church-

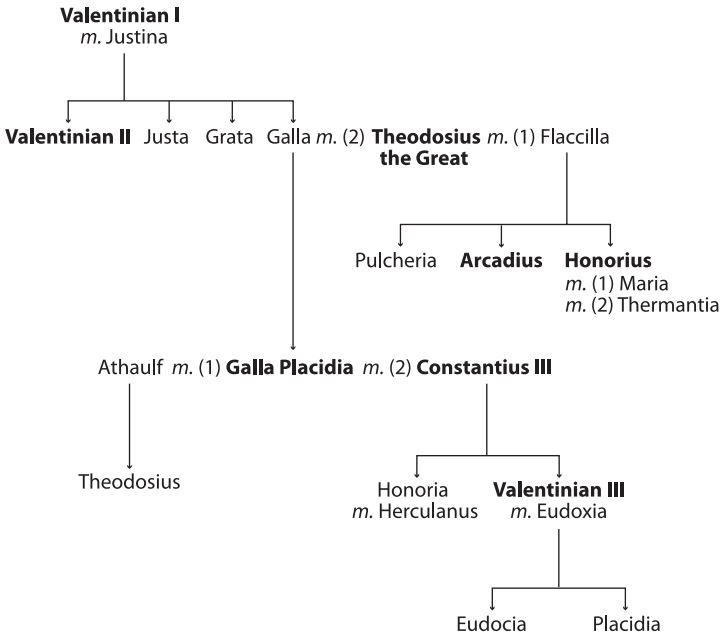


Figure I.1. The House of Theodosius in the West (emperors shown in bold)
(Art by Katina Daanen)

men—revealing their concerns. By weaving these sources together, I have traced a narrative of this violent period of transition as the Roman Empire gave way to the medieval kingdoms. We are remarkably fortunate to even have some documents and artworks that reveal Placidia's own thoughts. Letters written by her on two separate occasions survive that allow us to hear her literary voice across time, and the inscriptions she left on mosaics also reveal the way she wanted to be perceived and remembered. The cover illustration is a contemporary portrait of Placidia (in pearls) and her two children. The empress commissioned this image and placed it on a gold crucifix, showing her family's relationship with the church. It gives us a rare, personal glimpse of an ancient empress.

While most historians from the eighteenth century onward have regarded Placidia as hardly more than a feminine footnote in the unraveling of the western Roman Empire, a few have highlighted her contribution. In 1968, Stewart Irvin Oost published an important "biographical essay," in which he offered a close reading of the sources to show the influence of Placidia on the events of her time. In many places, I have followed his impeccable scholarship. However,

cautious historian of the 1960s that he was, Oost concluded only that Placidia was a "worthy child" of her father Theodosius the Great.[5] She was more than that, however; she was a powerful empress in her own right. A second influential work is that of Kenneth G. Holum, whose book on the Theodosian empresses places Placidia's exertion of power within the context of the other powerful empresses of this dynasty.[6] This context made it easier for Placidia to exert her sovereignty, and it also makes it easier for us to believe in her authority. More recently, Hagith Sivan analyzed the period of Placidia's life from a feminist perspective.[7] These precedents and the ongoing work on women in the ancient world conducted by many skillful scholars have helped me fill in the bare historical outline of Placidia to draw a fuller portrait of this impressive woman.

As I unraveled this complicated tale of the slow end of the old Roman Empire, I found myself increasingly drawn to the woman at the center of it and became convinced that her story was worth telling. Placidia found new ways to hold and express power in an age that devalued women's contributions, and she kept her sights on God—indeed on the *City of God*—while she operated, sometimes ruthlessly, in the earthly city that is this world. Her history explains much about the shaping of medieval society, and her life offers lessons about how individuals negotiate the complexities of their lives and how choices can create ripple effects in the tightly woven tapestry of the past.

CHAPTER 1

The "Most Noble" Princess

379–395

In 379 the venerable Roman Empire was badly bloodied. Migrating bands of Goths, whom the Romans called barbarians, were making serious encroachments across increasingly permeable borders, and the once-invincible Roman army had been soundly defeated by barbarians the year before at the Battle of Adrianople, where Emperor Valens himself had been killed. The surviving emperor, Gratian, had to take dramatic action if the empire were to survive. He sent a call to Spain, to the estates of Flavius Theodosius, who had once been master of cavalry in the Roman armies, and invited him to be the new coemperor (Augustus) in the East, with the capital at Constantinople, the great city that had served as the capital for earlier emperors. Gratian planned to continue to rule in the western part of the empire as Theodosius's colleague. The thirty-two-year-old Theodosius must have been surprised by the invitation and perhaps daunted by the challenge it posed. His job was to push back the violent tide of barbarians and save the empire.

When Theodosius left his estates in Spain to become emperor, he knew that the Gothic invasions were not the only threat to the stability of the empire; he also needed to secure the succession if he was going to establish a dynasty. For over a century, the peace of Rome had been repeatedly threatened by civil wars among competing pretenders to the throne. For example, in the fifty years between the end of the Severan dynasty (with the death of Alexander Severus) in 235 and the stable rule of Diocletian beginning in 283, there had been twenty-two men acclaimed as emperor, each with his own army to forward his claims. Soldiers and civilians alike died during these seemingly endless wars, and families were caught up in the violence as emperors often killed their own relatives to keep their thrones secure.

Diocletian, who had ruled from 284 to 305, instituted many reforms to try to stop the carnage. He ended the tradition begun by Caesar Augustus at the beginning of the empire that emperors were simply "first citizens" (*princips*). Instead, he now insisted on being called "lord," establishing a distance between himself and his subjects; he was untouchable, regal, and, with luck, unassailable.

This change in the emperor's status led to increased ceremony surrounding the emperor and his family. No longer did the emperor wear a simple Roman toga; instead he donned heavy brocaded purple robes and wore jeweled sandals, items of clothing forbidden to others. He introduced the custom called "adoration of the purple," in which his subjects had to prostrate themselves in his presence, and the lucky few were allowed to kiss the hem of his robe. Subsequent emperors, including Theodosius, adopted these court rituals, which shaped the experience of the imperial family members, including Placidia. Diocletian was strong enough to ward off competing contenders for the throne, but after his death, rivals and assassinations continued to plague the imperial household. Indeed, invaders took advantage of armies weakened by civil strife, and leaders were afraid to commit too many resources to the borders of the empire without also keeping a careful watch at their backs.

Thus, when Theodosius took up the title Augustus, he had to think of not only the barbarians at the gates but how to secure his own household. He was acutely aware of the importance of family ties long before Galla Placidia was born. While in Spain, Theodosius had married Aelia Flavia Flaccilla, from a family of Spanish aristocrats. Before Theodosius was called to the East, his wife had born two children, a girl, Pulcheria, and a son, Arcadius; this family came with him and shared in his triumph in Sirmium (in modern Serbia). They were joined by Theodosius's favored niece, Serena, who had been adopted by Theodosius when her father died and who would become a major force in Placidia's youth. In Sirmium, Gratian appointed Theodosius Augustus on January 19, 379, and the two emperors began to address the problems left by the disastrous loss to the Goths at Adrianople.

Through the winter of 378–379, Gratian and Theodosius worked together to build a government and recruit more soldiers to send east against the Goths. In the spring of 379, the two achieved some early military victories, and Gratian felt sufficiently secure to return west to his capital in Milan. However, the Gothic raids through the Balkans so disrupted supply lines that Theodosius was unable to go to Constantinople. Instead, he took his family to the fortified city of Salonica (Thessalonica) in Macedonia, where supplies could flow into its great harbor

on the Aegean Sea. This city had become almost as important as Constantinople since it lay along the venerable road, the *Via Egnatia*, along which commanders from Julius Caesar to Trajan had marched to fight wars to the east.

Theodosius's plans were interrupted in the winter at Salonica when he became gravely ill. Thinking he was on his deathbed, he called for a priest to baptize him (a rite often delayed in an age that worried less about cleansing original sin and more about avoiding sin after baptism). When Theodosius recovered full health, he credited the church for his recovery and remained its staunch defender. Recognizing how fleeting life could be, he decided that he had to secure the imperial succession for his family.

In the spring of 380, Theodosius took the field against the Goths, albeit cautiously. Through skirmishes and negotiation, he appeared to stabilize the situation without risking his armies in a pitched battle. The emperor then turned his attention to the propaganda war, convincing the people that his was a mighty and legitimate dynasty. He entered Constantinople in triumph in the fall of 380, although he had certainly not won the kind of victory that traditionally earned such a celebratory imperial procession. Even so, the citizens of Constantinople cheered as the new royal family marched through the city to take residence in the great palace that dominated the high ground and overlooked the Sea of Marmara, guarding the significant trade routes connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.

Theodosius's dealings with the Goths were marked by his shrewd negotiations, in which he turned various Gothic bands into his soldiers and settled others on Roman lands. When Theodosius followed up this policy with a treaty in 382 settling the Goths in Thrace in the Balkans, some Romans wanted war instead. However, the Greek panegyrist Themistius, who probably joined Athanaric at Theodosius's banquet, wrote a fine apology for peace: "Which then is better: to fill Thrace with corpses or with farmers? To fill it with graves or with people? To travel through wilderness or cultivated lands?"[1] It was a practical solution to managing the armies at his doorstep, and Theodosius took it. This policy continued after his death and shaped the history of the House of Theodosius, including the reign of his daughter, Placidia.

A settled peace, even a temporary one, allowed the emperor to focus on what had always been the greatest threat to Roman emperors: his own household. Since Theodosius had in mind to establish a dynasty, that meant his whole family had to be recognized as imperial and kept safe from competing claimants to the throne. Theodosius's efforts to secure his household would ultimately, and inadvertently, pave the way for Placidia to rule. He was demonstrating that blood

was thicker than armies, family more important than winning battles. (A daughter could preserve a ruling dynasty as well as military sons, but that would come in the future.) Theodosius had sons, and he wanted to make sure they lived to rule after him. His first step was to raise his son Arcadius to the rank of Augustus, which he did in January 383, shortly after he had secured peace with the Goths. In a solemn ceremony, Theodosius draped the five-year-old boy with a military cloak of purple, fastened it with a jeweled fibula (a brooch), and placed a small imperial crown on his head. As soldiers cheered, the boy was accorded equal rank with his father, a move that was supposed to assure a peaceful succession and show the world the Theodosian dynasty was there to stay. Arcadius now was entitled to receive the "adoration of the purple," and courtiers prostrated themselves in his presence, a practice that must have contributed to spoiling the young prince.

The crowning of young Arcadius was not unprecedented—emperors had raised their sons to office before—but Theodosius went further, crowning his wife Flaccilla as well. She became, officially, "Augusta," empress. She was not the first to be called that. From the beginning of the empire, many of the emperors' wives had been given the honorific title of empress, and even as late as the third century, Emperor Constantine had given the title to his mother Helena. These empresses were portrayed in art and on coins in ways that were significantly different from the emperors. They wore the headdresses of goddesses, not the crowns of the emperors, and their gowns had no military markings. The empresses of the Theodosian dynasty, however, were shown very differently; they were equal in status to their men.

In an unusual ceremony, Theodosius awarded Flaccilla a purple military cloak fastened on the right shoulder with a jeweled fibula and crowned her with a jeweled imperial diadem, just as he had done for Arcadius. By this action, Theodosius drew no distinction between the imperial rank of his son and that of his wife. Was this a conscious decision to emphasize dynasty over military prowess? Was it simply convenient to use the same ceremony? The motivation doesn't matter as much as the result: Here was a woman who was, in appearance, fully emperor.

The unprecedented ceremony raising Flaccilla to the status of Augusta occurred before Placidia was born, but it would be influential in her life. We are used to spending coins without noticing whose figure is struck on them, but in the ancient world, coins were important forms of propaganda, and the images on them were carefully chosen to shape public opinion. The artist who designed the images to be imprinted onto a solid gold coin (called a *solidus*) was careful to

Figure 1.1. Solidus of Flaccilla, ca. 383
(Art by Katina Daanen)

express exactly what the patron wanted to portray. When the young Placidia held a coin (shown in fig. 1.1) and saw a woman distinguished with exactly the same honors that her brother had received during his coronation, she saw a model of what she, too, could become—an empress in the fullest sense. Other women of the Theodosian dynasty, including Placidia's daughter, struck coins showing them as empresses in full military regalia, so Flaccilla's rank and coin had a long-standing influence.[2]

In 384, a year after her coronation, Flaccilla bore another son, Honorius, and the people of Constantinople and the imperial household celebrated. She had now produced not only an heir but a "spare," so it seemed that the dynasty would last and bring peace and prosperity to the land. Theodosius was so pleased with this son born to the purple that he broke Roman precedent and awarded the toddler the political title of "consul."

Back during the Roman Republic, the consul had been the highest executive office, an annual appointment shared by two of the worthiest men. Consuls had to be at least forty-two years old, and they served as generals of Rome's armies. Under the empire established by Caesar Augustus in 27 BC, consuls continued to be the most important public officials, and emperors frequently appointed them as a way to announce their favorites. Theodosius had issued a law in 382 that reinforced the primary position of consuls in the administration of the empire, proclaiming, "We decree that all the highest ranking dignities must yield precedence to the consulship."[3] By giving Honorius the title of consul, Theodosius dramatically changed the nature of the consulship, turning a venerable ap-

pointment into a family prerogative. Honorius was born in 384, and the emperor named him to serve as consul in the year 386 (though his appointment probably took place the year before). Honorius's mother wrapped the little boy in the huge consular robes, and held his hand as he toddled to the ceremonial consular chair in front of the senate.[4]

There are several things that are shocking about this incident. First, it shows how far the old Roman structures had fallen in service of creating a family dynasty. Indeed, the political had become very personal. Second, it is surprising that there was no outcry at this degradation of a venerable office. In fact, the poet Claudian later praised the purported accomplishments of the child consul, claiming that Honorius had brought good luck to his father's endeavors when Theodosius pushed back barbarians who were crossing the Danube. While the boy, of course, had nothing to do with this military good fortune, Claudian claims Theodosius credited Honorius with influencing the events anyway.[5] A devoted family man, Theodosius wanted his children to be successful.

Soon, however, the family experienced tragedy. In 385, shortly after the celebration of Honorius's consulship, Theodosius's seven-year-old daughter Pulcheria died suddenly. Theodosius had loved the bright child, and he must have been devastated. Shortly after Pulcheria's death, another blow struck the household when the empress Flaccilla died. Once again, the people of Constantinople took to the streets weeping as another funeral procession passed through the town. As Bishop Gregory of Nyssa described, "The people assemble together, that is, both strangers and residents, and do not remain silent but receive her entry with loud wailing." The bishop was called upon to deliver her funeral oration. He gave Flaccilla credit for sharing the emperor's care for the church and for her own deeds of philanthropy that had made her beloved by her people.[6] In his eulogy, Gregory reminded the people that the empress was beloved by God and essential to making the household of Theodosius legitimate. The emperor had succeeded in creating a dynasty. He had two sons to follow him, but he had lost an empress and a beloved daughter.

BIRTH OF A NEW PRINCESS: GALLA PLACIDIA

The political situation in the West was volatile, and, as so often happened during the empire's history, usurpers were challenging imperial rule. In 383, while Theodosius was consolidating his rule in the East, his coemperor Gratian had been killed by a usurper, Maximus. After a quick victory over Gratian's troops, Maximus established his capital in Trier, near the Rhine frontier. Maximus agreed to keep Gratian's half-brother, the twelve-year-old Valentinian II, as coemperor in

Milan and offered peace to Theodosius, to avoid civil war. Maximus and Theodosius knew each other; both were from Spain and had fought together in early campaigns. Theodosius was in no position to send troops to challenge Maximus, nor was he willing to throw his support behind the usurper. An uneasy truce settled among the three emperors, but it appeared that Theodosius was only biding his time before he came to support Valentinian against the general Maximus.

Theodosius couldn't turn his attention (and armies) to the West until his eastern border with the Persian Empire was secure. For several years, from 384 to 387, Theodosius's representatives had been negotiating a treaty with Persia, and eventually, Theodosius signed one that gave up a good deal of Roman land in exchange for peace. These negotiations had been conducted by a trusted young general, Stilicho, and in 384, as Stilicho returned from Persia through Constantinople, Theodosius arranged for his niece Serena to marry him. At first glance, the general was a surprising choice. Although he was thoroughly Romanized, Stilicho was originally from the Germanic tribe, the Vandals. Theodosius was a shrewd politician, however, and his choice of Stilicho as a husband for his niece was actually brilliant. The emperor knew that the barbarian presence in the empire was permanent, and he had to find someone who could both fight against them as well as lead those barbarians who fought in Rome's army. Stilicho was that man. He may also have been Serena's choice; by all accounts, their marriage was a happy partnership. She worried and prayed for him when he was at war and was his confidant when he returned home. She carefully listened to court gossip and protected Stilicho from plots and threats.

In 387, the Persian treaty secured Theodosius's eastern front, the general Stilicho was loyally married into his household, and Theodosius was a widower. It was time for him to make a politically expedient second marriage, and he turned to Italy. He arranged to marry Galla, sister of Valentinian II, the young figurehead emperor ruling in the shadow of the usurper Maximus. It was a strong statement of support, and Maximus had to know that his overtures to Theodosius had been rejected. Civil war would come again to the empire.

According to the chronicler Zosimus, Valentinian's mother Justina decided to use Galla's appearance and Theodosius's reputed susceptibility to beauty to ensure her son's safety. In the summer of 387, Justina, Valentinian, and Galla fled from Italy (and Maximus) to Salonica, where Theodosius had originally been named emperor. They wrote to Theodosius, asking for his help, and he arrived in person. Zosimus writes that Theodosius was struck by Galla's beauty, and Justina promised him the girl if he would agree to avenge Gratian and kill Maximus.[7] He married her and prepared for war. While it maybe that the emperor was capti-

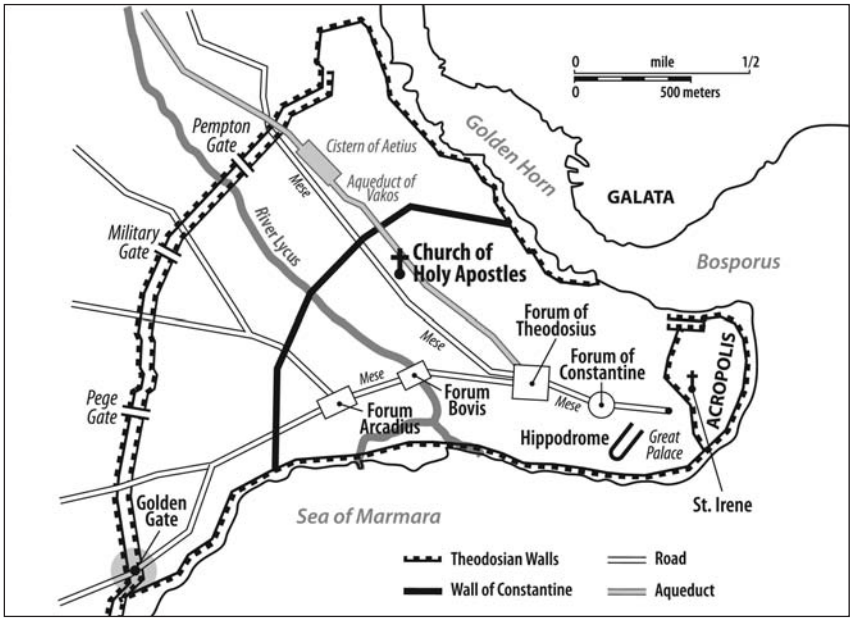
vated by the beauty of his new bride, Theodosius was probably always planning to attack Maximus, and now he was in a position to do so. In addition, the marriage to Galla effectively joined the two sides of the empire together into one family, further solidifying the Theodosian dynasty.

The families stayed in the royal palace in Salonica through the winter of 387–388 as Theodosius planned for war. When spring came, the mountain passes opened, the sailing season began, and the parties dispersed. Theodosius left for the West, stalking the usurper; Justina took her two other daughters, Justa and Grata, to sail for Italy, and Galla remained in Salonica, pregnant and frail. In 388 or 389, Galla bore a healthy, beautiful daughter and named her Galla Placidia, giving the child her own name and adding what was probably a family name from Theodosius's side. Far from Constantinople and with her father away at war, it was an inauspicious birth for the little princess, who was called Placidia.

Theodosius quickly defeated Maximus's forces in 388, and the usurper's own soldiers killed him in August of that year. Valentinian (and his mother Justina) were quickly restored to power in Milan, but Theodosius wanted to ensure a place for his own blood in the dynastic struggles that had plagued Rome for centuries. His son, Arcadius, was nominally ruling in Constantinople, so Theodosius sent for his second son, Honorius, who was five years old. He joined his father and was presented to the senators in Rome as the future ruler of the western portion of the empire. By 391, Theodosius believed that this part of the empire was secure. The young Valentinian was emperor, well guarded by the Gothic general Arbogast, and Theodosius's interests were secured by the Vandal Stilicho. With typical military strategy, Theodosius had secured his political back in Rome and Milan, so he felt he could return with Honorius to Constantinople, where he would be restored to his young wife and get to know his little daughter, Placidia. His return was important, for they needed his help. His son Arcadius wanted neither a stepmother nor a stepsister.

After recovering from childbirth and while Theodosius was still at war, Galla had traveled with her new infant to Constantinople to take her place in the magnificent royal palace complex that overlooked the sea, but Arcadius, who was presiding over the household in Theodosius's absence, refused to allow them entrance.[8] Arcadius was only about eleven years old at the time, and while there is no doubt that the spoiled boy (which by all accounts Arcadius was) would pull rank and exclude them, it's hard to believe that wiser heads in the palace didn't prevail. There must have been some political posturing going on, with courtiers betting on Arcadius over the unknown new wife.

The chronicler's simple statement that Arcadius "exiled" his stepmother from



Constantinople, Fifth Century
(Art by Katina Daanen)

the palace, does not fully capture the nature of the slight, for the palace was the center of power. The emperor Constantine in 313 had built the vast palace complex in the best part of his new city. Visitors entered through a huge antechamber with roof and doors of gilded bronze. The ceilings were covered with brilliant mosaics, and the walls and floors were dressed with fine multicolored marble broken with lines of undulating blue. Behind this doorway the palace grounds stretched south and southeast down forested slopes to a wall surrounding the Sea of Marmara and the Bosporus, where the royal family could watch dolphins at play. There were various groups of buildings interspersed with gardens, terraces, pavilions, swimming pools, and many other structures used by the royal family and their favorites.

The palace was adjacent to the great hippodrome, where emperors presided over the popular chariot races, stepping from the palace to a balcony overseeing the track. The hippodrome held about 100,000 spectators and was the most important gathering place for the citizens and the visible hallmark of imperial power. Theodosius left his mark on the great track in 390, when he ordered an Egyptian obelisk erected in the center. It still stands today. The carved pedestal shows Theodosius, surrounded by spectators and musicians, awarding a crown

to a victorious charioteer. The inscription on the pedestal includes a statement of his philosophy: "All things yield to Theodosius and to his everlasting descendants." He planned for his sons to preside over the city in his hippodrome.

In the private gardens by the sea, stood a chamber decorated with porphyry (a reddish- purple-hued stone) that served as the birthing place for imperial children. Here children were "born in the purple," which meant not only that they were born in a purple room but also that they were destined to wear the purple robes of royalty. Birth "in the purple" conveyed a great deal of status in the ancient world. As the poet and propagandist Claudian noted, Honorius was the only one of the three children to have actually been born in the palace: "You only were reared in the palace; your happy growth was in ancestral purple, and your young limbs were never outraged by common clothing . . . . On a couch of gold, clothed in jeweled robes, your mother gave birth to you among Tyrian purples; a palace rang with joy at that royal deliverance."[9] Arcadius had been born before his father became emperor, and Placidia had been born in Greece.

Regardless of the location of her birth, however, Placidia had as much claim as her brothers to a place at the palace, but her mother lacked the strength to force Arcadius to give her entrance to the royal halls. Being refused access to the palace compound meant that Galla and her daughter were excluded from the centers of power, from the petitions of the people, and from the intrigues and bribes of the courtiers. Galla had to establish a separate household for herself and her infant. Most likely one of Theodosius's supporters gave the rather frail mother one of the many palaces within the city. The great fourth-century orator and patriarch of Constantinople John Chrysostom describes these homes of the wealthy in his sermons, berating them for their luxury, so we know the lavish style that surrounded Placidia. Chrysostom tells us that many nobles owned ten or twenty mansions, with doors of ivory, ceilings lined with gold, and floors covered with carpets or inlaid with mosaics.[10]

When Theodosius returned to Constantinople in 391, he was greeted by Galla and her toddler. Meeting her for the first time, he apparently was quite taken with the beautiful child, and perhaps he remembered his daughter Pulcheria, who had died so young. We do not know how he felt about Arcadius's rejection of Galla, but he did not directly confront his young heir. Perhaps he was looking for peace in the family. What he did do was provide for Placidia's security. Too smart to leave her support to her half-brothers, Theodosius formally bestowed upon her a household near the great palace and an independent income,[11] thus ensuring her future financial independence.

Theodosius was waiting for an auspicious moment to show off the child and

her mother to the people of Constantinople, and he created just such an occasion about a year later, when he planned a coronation to make his second son, eight-year-old Honorius, emperor. For Theodosius (and probably any effective emperor), the personal and political were intricately intertwined, and this was true of the timing of Honorius's elevation. In the summer of 392, the western court had confronted a new crisis. The young emperor Valentinian was found strangled to death. Some said he was murdered; others claimed it was suicide.[12] Either way, the throne in the West was empty. In August 392, Flavius Eugenius, a Roman who had the backing of the Senate, was raised to be emperor. Although Eugenius sent messages of peace, offering to share the rulership, Theodosius knew that a challenge to his dynasty had been made. It was time to crown another emperor for the West, and he chose his son Honorius.

A great celebration was planned for the coronation, which took place on January 23, 393. Not only were Constantinople's citizens to acknowledge the crowning of a new Augustus, but they were to meet the princess, Placidia, who was now five years old. Galla did not take part in the ceremony; she was probably pregnant and already had experienced one or two miscarriages. The day was a celebration of Theodosius and his three living children. The court poet Claudian recounted the details in his panegyric to Honorius. He describes a lavish royal procession moving down the hill from the royal palace that dominated the heights of Constantinople along the broad road known as Mesê, or "Middle Street." The procession moved west through the city to the huge, ornate Golden Gate, which opened to allow them to exit through the massive city walls. Along a road that was shaded with olive and cypress trees, crowds gathered to gawk at the royal family, who were seldom seen outside the palace walls. Cheers, blessings, and calls of good wishes rang in the air.

In the largest and most decorated chariot in the parade rode Honorius, joined by his sixteen-year old brother, Arcadius, and the princess Placidia. While it was Honorius's special day, all three children were dressed the same in clothing designed to awe the crowd, wearing flowing golden robes with bright gold headdresses set in their hair.[13] Of course, ancient sources do not say how this procession affected the child, but we can well imagine that the young princess remembered this glorious day, which was one of the few bright moments of her childhood. It is equally likely that this celebration awoke an ambition that one day, she, too, would wear the robe of Augusta and soldiers would cheer for her. It was an ambition she later expressed. But at this moment, it was only the seed of a dream, and the day remained her brother's.

Once the procession of chariots, soldiers, and courtiers left the city, it moved

along the edge of the Sea of Marmora to Hebdomon (modern Bakirköy) seven miles away. Hebdomon had royal palaces, churches, and more importantly, great open spaces for people to assemble, and gather they did. Legions of soldiers paraded in their best uniforms, the colorful banners of each cohort held proudly in the air. Even here in the countryside, people lined the road to catch a glimpse of the royal family, and crowds pressed into every corner of the fields surrounding the center square.

The weather was stormy, with rain clouds so dark that the day seemed like night. However, the ceremony had to continue in spite of the impending storm. As was customary, soldiers raised the golden-clad boy into the air with a shout of proclamation, and at the exact moment the child was raised, the sun broke through the clouds. Claudian wrote, "A prophetic radiance was over all things."[14] The sun seemed to be such a fine augury for the day that the emperor jumped into the glittering chariot and lovingly embraced his children. The future seemed bright for the House of Theodosius.

As the army and the people cheered, Honorius, just like his brother before him, was wrapped in a purple cloak of high military rank attached on the right shoulder by a large, gold brooch. He was crowned with the diadem of imperial office and joined his brother as co-Augustus; they were destined to divide the empire between them at their father's death. At about this same time, Theodosius awarded Placidia the title of "most noble girl" (*nobilissima puella*), a traditional first step to being awarded the title of empress.

When the family returned to the palace after the ceremony, Theodosius addressed Honorius in company with his other children. Claudian recounts in detail the advice Theodosius purportedly gave them on this occasion; it was advice that reflected traditional Roman values and was absolutely inapplicable to Theodosius's sons. The emperor first claimed that since his son was now a ruler of Rome, he must not just count on his royal blood to legitimate his rule, he must earn his title by his deeds: "It is merit, not blood, that must be an emperor's support."[15] Meritorious behavior included a Stoic conquest of passions, self-awareness, and mercy. Theodosius, who was a consummate law giver, also stressed that an emperor must pass laws and obey the laws he passed. Finally, Theodosius reminded Honorius that emperors must be soldiers and share with their troops the hardships of the field: "Eat such food as you can find. It will be a solace to your soldiers that your work is as heavy as theirs; be the first to climb the steep hill, and if necessity demands the felling of a forest, do not be ashamed to grasp the axe and chop down the oak. . . Boldly tread the frozen river; swim the flood. Mount your horse and ride among your squadrons of cavalry or stand

foot to foot with the infantry."[16] Claudian reports that Honorius interrupted his father and begged to join him on a military campaign immediately. He cried enthusiastically, "Take me with you. Let my arrows pierce a tyrant's body, and the barbarians pale at my bow. . . . Quick, give me arms." Proud Theodosius kissed his son's lips and refused, telling him to study and learn so that when his time came to rule and fight, he would be ready.

Claudian's account of this speech seems roughly accurate, given what we know of Theodosius. Theodosius was a soldier-emperor like those of old he had described. Even though he wasn't always able to control his passions (his bad temper was legendary), he knew that he should. His soldiers knew their leader shared their hardships and fought all the more bravely for that. But Theodosius was the last emperor of this kind that Rome would see. The very fact that he crowned both his sons when they were so young means that they received their crowns based on blood, not on merit. Both Honorius and Arcadius were lethargic, spoiled boys, who never set foot on the battlefield.

What did Placidia make of this speech? Probably not much at the time, when she was five, but when she listened to Claudian recite it publicly five years later, the ten year old, who had growing ambitions, might have learned a good deal. Since she knew that her brothers received their titles because of blood, not merit, that opened the way for her to rise to power; the blood of Theodosius ran through her veins, too. She also knew that while it was important to guard the borders of the empire, her brothers had demonstrated that an emperor need not take the field personally. Finally, she accepted the importance of law and made it a central feature of her reign.

Less than a year after the public celebration, Galla died in childbirth. This had to be a serious blow to Placidia. Although her father loved her, she had lost her main protector. Now, instead of living separately with her mother, she likely moved directly into the palace, where she had to navigate the treacherous halls of the court and the sibling rivalry of her brothers.

GROWING UP AT COURT

By crowning his sons while they were young, Theodosius was making the strong statement that they had the right to rule by virtue of their blood ties to him rather than any military or other talent. He believed this approach would ensure smooth dynastic succession without civil war or military claimants, and he was partially right; both boys took power smoothly, but they were both incompetent. Throughout history, rulers have struggled with the problem of how to raise strong sons. Weak rulers frequently allowed space for strong women to come to the fore,

because the same conditions that weakened boys often strengthened girls. This situation was true in the household of Theodosius; Placidia's brothers' shortcomings facilitated the princess's rise to power.

What caused the weakness in Theodosius's sons? Leaving aside any genetic considerations, their pampered upbringing in a huge, complex court certainly did nothing to encourage them to grow strong and independent. Not only were they surrounded by fawning courtiers who satisfied their every whim, but Theodosius added a new element to traditional Roman childrearing practices. He emulated the earlier Persian precedent of filling the royal household with enslaved eunuchs.

Courts, such as the Chinese and later Muslim households, that relied on dynastic ties as the route to power often trusted their women to the care of castrated men as a way of making sure that the heirs were of the blood of the ruler. There is no reason to think that the pious Flaccilla would have given Theodosius any reason to doubt the paternity of his sons. It is more likely that Theodosius was guarding his family from the perennial Roman problem of usurpers rising from the household of the emperors. Eunuchs could have ambition only for themselves, as they were childless and therefore could not try to establish a dynasty of their own. Furthermore, it appears that eunuchs owed loyalty to their owners, as this was the base of their personal power. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus claimed that eunuch slaves fetched a much higher price than others because "they are more trustworthy in every respect,"[17] and the Theodosian household seems to have shared this opinion.

Throughout the ancient world, people relied on slaves to do almost all their work, and many of these slaves were badly treated. However, the large-scale reliance on eunuchs in the eastern court led to horrible abuse of boys and to the most inhumane slave trafficking in history. Slave-traders captured young boys in Africa or in the lands that bordered the Roman Empire. Usually, the preferred boys were between the ages of six and ten so they would be strong enough to withstand the surgery, but sometimes infants were taken. These children were then transported to a central place for their castration, and the operation was brutal. The surgeon took a sharp knife and quickly sliced off the testicles or, in a more extreme procedure, removed both penis and testicles to create "complete eunuchs." The mutilated boys lay at the edge of death for three to five days. Those made complete eunuchs had a tube placed in their urethra until the wound healed. Only about one-third of the castrated boys survived the subsequent infections, but the higher price of a eunuch made the loss profitable to the slavers. We have no figures for the numbers of eunuchs provided to Constantinople during this early period, but

later figures describe thousands of eunuchs serving the imperial household; that means many thousands of boys died during the surgery.

Once purchased from slavers, young castrates were brought up in special quarters within the palace complex, and older eunuchs trained the new arrivals in court protocol and other things they needed to know. In the court of Theodosius, these eunuchs functioned as barbers, physicians, advisors, confidants, and chamberlains, with the closest access to the imperial family. Some eunuchs served in the army and became commanders in their own right.

One might imagine that eunuch slaves would harbor such anger at their owners that they would be untrustworthy in the close quarters of the household, but this was not the case. Anger at their ill treatment was focused on the slave-traders who had mutilated them, and they were usually very loyal to the emperors in the only home remaining to them. Loyalty to their owners did not mean, however, that eunuchs were exempt from political machinations. Palace eunuchs jockeyed for power just like others with access to the palace, and they knew that weak rulers meant more power for the eunuchs who surrounded them. Both Arcadius and Honorius seemed perfectly willing to let the eunuchs who had raised them make their public decisions as long as they could continue to enjoy their frivolous palace life. Weak rulers also created a vacuum that allowed women in their households to come to power. This was true for Arcadius's wife, and it was true for Placidia. It is one of the many ironies of the past that, in trying so hard to preserve his dynasty by isolating his sons behind palace walls, Theodosius set the stage for its decline. It was a stroke of luck for the House of Theodosius that Placidia grew up away from the worst excesses of the court. However, when her time to rule came, she too entrusted her children to courtly eunuchs that she brought to the West.

Theodosius had strong opinions about how his sons should be educated, expecting them at the very least to acquire the physical skills of warfare. Honorius enjoyed riding and hunting, both of which were prerequisites to fighting, although there is no evidence that he ever learned to fight with the lethal short sword that had for so long ensured Rome's success in battles. Arcadius, however, seems to have skipped engaging in physical activity altogether. Theodosius, traditional Roman that he was, also urged his sons to study history, saying, "Study the lives of the heroes of old to accustom you for the wars that are to be."[18] The princes' eunuchs were supposed to teach the boys all the virtues that could be learned from great historical Romans, but theory and practice broke apart in the schoolroom. There is no evidence that the spoiled princes learned these lessons; who knows if they were ever taught them, for their father wasn't there to reinforce these values, and his sons suffered from his absence. The eunuchs had no stake in

fostering strong, independent rulers, gaining as they did their own power through weak emperors. Theodosius was not the first father, nor the last, to assume that sons from his loins would grow up to be like him, and his trust in nature over nurture was misplaced.

Contemporaries accused Arcadius of allowing ministers to lead him "like an ox" and of having a "halting speech" and "drooping eyes." One bold critic even went so far as to say to the young emperor: "You take pleasure only in corporal enjoyments of the most sensual kind which touch and taste provide, living the life of a jelly-fish."[19] Arcadius seldom even ventured out of the palace complex, so he grew up detached from the empire and the people that he was supposed to be governing. He relied completely on his advisors, eunuchs, and wife to make the decisions for the empire.

Placidia, too, was raised with all the luxury that the eastern nobility had come to expect. She had slaves and eunuchs to cater to her every whim, and the sources describe a pampered life. A naked eunuch combed her hair and held a silver bowl of water for her to wash. When she grew too hot, a eunuch fanned her with peacock feathers.[20] Chrysostom described beds and chairs of ivory in her bedroom and tables of gold or silver in the public rooms.[21] However luxurious her life, though, her tenuous position with her brothers kept her from completely relaxing into decadence, and with her mother dead, the young girl needed a female guardian. True to all his previous patterns, her father looked to family, and he entrusted Placidia to the care of his beloved Serena. No one was closer to the emperor than Serena. When he was troubled with public business or flew into one of his legendary rages, his wife Flaccilla would not approach him and his young sons fled his presence. Only Serena came to him, speaking softly and stilling his wrath. In addition, Serena's husband Stilicho could provide the strong military arm to guard all his children, and Theodosius did not worry that Stilicho would try to supplant his sons on the throne because by law a barbarian could not be raised to imperial rank. Therefore, Stilicho and Serena seemed perfect guardians.

Stilicho and Serena had three children of their own: two daughters, Maria and Thermantia, and a son Eucherius, who was the same age as Placidia. Stilicho and Serena naturally hoped to see their own children married into the imperial family, and just as predictably, the ambitious Placidia resented their hopes.

Theodosius also depended on God to keep his family safe and his dynastic hopes alive. From the time he was cured from his illness, Theodosius was a vigorous supporter of the church, and he surrounded himself with bishops and considered himself protected by their prayers. His sons seem to have ignored this piety, but Placidia took it to heart, and her future policies included an influen-

tial attention to religious matters. However, that would be in the future; for now, Theodosius turned his attention to imperial religious institutions in a way that changed the history of the church and the West.

WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS BELIEVE?

Theodosius not only had to contend with threats of violence from within and outside the empire; he also faced deep religious controversies, which tore the social fabric even more deeply than wars. In the early fourth century, Emperor Constantine had accepted Christianity as one of the permitted religions, and subsequent imperial support made the Christian church a growing presence throughout the land. However, Constantine's decree left unresolved as many questions as it answered. What was to be the relationship between church and state? What about the religious disagreements that had divided Christians since the earliest centuries of their religions' existence? Theodosius, Placidia, and all the men and women of the Theodosian dynasty had to negotiate religious disputes as an important part of their reigns, and their resolution of such controversies has influenced our modern world in ways we hardly remember.

Disputes about details of theology were vigorously argued in ways that seem incomprehensible to modern believers. Visitors to Constantinople quickly discovered that it was a city where everyone was a theologian. As one contemporary observed, "Ask one of them to change some silver and he explains instead how the Son differs from the Father. Ask another the price of a loaf of bread and he replies that the Son is inferior to the Father. Ask a third if your bath is ready and he tells you that the Son was created out of nothingness."[22]

By the time of Theodosius's rule, there were religious differences that seemed to threaten to split the empire. The most immediate had to do with the entrenched polytheists, who believed that the Roman Empire had endured so long because of the favor of ancient gods, such as Jupiter, Juno, and the whole Roman pantheon. Could a Christian emperor rule in the old city of Rome surrounded by temples, altars, and a powerful traditional priesthood? And, could the Empire continue half polytheist and half Christian? In his characteristically bold fashion, Theodosius took on traditional Romans directly.

In 380, shortly after he was named emperor, he issued a law that profoundly changed the Roman Empire—and subsequent Western history. He wrote, "It is Our will that all the peoples who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans." He further declared, "We command that those persons who

follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians."[23] With his command and the stroke of his scribe's pen, the Roman Catholic Church was born. As we will see, a decade later, he would begin seriously to enforce this decree. Beginning about this time, Christians began to call polytheists *pagans*, an insulting term meaning rustic country people. By the late fourth century, it began to refer solely to those who worshipped the traditional Roman and Greek gods, and it was hurled at many by the Christian writers in the court of Theodosius. The emperor soon struck hard against these pagans, but in 380 other issues called for his attention.

Once he had declared that all had to become Christian, Theodosius faced another religious problem that had arisen within the Christian community itself during the formative years of the church: What was the nature of the Trinity in a strongly monotheistic religion? Quarrels over interpretation began to develop during the second century, when some Christian thinkers explained the nature of God in terms that reconciled Christian truth with classical Platonism. The issue had to do with the nature of the incarnated Christ, and the question arose with the Gospels: the first three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) described Jesus's historical location and beginnings in Palestine. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, began with an explanation of the mystery of the person of Jesus; it moved beyond the historical event into a cosmic one: "In the beginning was the Word [Greek: *logos*] and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This statement raised the question of the relationship between the Word and the Creator.

In the early fourth century, during the time of Constantine the Great, the emperor who first tolerated Christianity and allowed the controversies within the Christian communities to emerge from the shadows and become public debate, an influential theologian named Arius argued for a strict monotheism presided over by the Creator that said that He first created the Word. His followers, who were called Arians, used his concise formula to articulate their position: "there was [a time] when He was not." That meant that before the creation of the world, God made the Word of God as his first creation. This preserved the strict monotheism by reducing the divinity of the Word and therefore of Jesus.[24] Jesus was nothing more than the incarnation of a creation of God the Father.

The controversy raged until Constantine called the Council of Nicaea in 325, which came to be known as the First Ecumenical (meaning universal) Council. After much violent discussion, the council ended up with a statement that rejected Arianism, calling Jesus the "Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father," which meant that Jesus was not a precosmic creation. This formula provided the

basis for what is now called the Nicene Creed, still recited in many churches. The council further condemned all those who believed there was a time "when He was not."[25]

Not surprisingly, a conciliar decree did not persuade everyone; it simply defined the battle lines. For the next century or so, Christians would be "Arians" or "Nicaeans," defining their belief in the precreation relationship between the Father and the Son. Also, not surprisingly, support for these positions often grew from political alignments rather than from a clear understanding of the theology. At the time of Theodosius, there were two main pockets of Arianism remaining. One was within the imperial family, for Galla's mother Justina was a committed Arian, and she had many supporters in the court of Milan. Even more troublesome, the Goths who formed such a significant portion of Theodosius's army had been converted by Ulfilas, an Arian bishop. Their allegiance, indeed their religious identity, was linked to the Arian cause. Any rulings issued in Greek from a council in Nicaea had no relevance to them. The Goths' deep-seated loyalty to Arianism remained a backdrop to imperial policy throughout the Theodosian dynasty, through Placidia's reign and beyond.

Emperor Theodosius was a committed Nicaean. When he had been deathly ill in 380, he called for a bishop to baptize him, and he insisted that the bishop be Nicaean, not Arian. His recovery after baptism convinced him that God was on the side of the Nicaeans, who soon came to be known as Catholics. His first wife, Flaccilla, was a strong advocate of the Nicaean position—once she prevented an articulate Arian bishop from seeing Theodosius because she was afraid the bishop might be too persuasive.[26] She need not have worried; Theodosius was fanatic about his cause, as his law criminalizing differences of religious belief shows. He legislated against those who did not adhere to Catholic dogma: "We adjudge [them] demented and insane. . . . Their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by our own retribution."[27] The emperor's cure placed him unambiguously on the side of the Catholics against the Arians, and he followed up his words with strong action.

To try to heal the animosity among factions and to consolidate the Catholic position, Theodosius summoned an ecumenical council to meet in Constantinople in 381. One hundred and fifty bishops gathered and confirmed the Catholic Nicaean position and condemned Arianism. This decision allowed Theodosius to ban Arianism throughout the empire, but he left an important exception: the Goths were permitted to follow their own brand of Christianity, so the empire and the army continued to be populated by Arian Goths.

Theodosius's Ecumenical Council of 381 also took on the remnants of paganism in Rome. First, it declared Constantinople the "new Rome," confirming the importance of that imperial city in politics and religion. The "old Rome" was a turbulent city, proud of its history, and did not readily bow its head to emperors or new gods. The chronicler Ammianus Marcellinus described a litany of "deplorable acts" that had plagued Rome in the 370s. He told of a rash of sorcerers putting curses on people, soothsayers predicting disasters, poisoners and fornicators coming to trial. As he lamented, "[T]hese and other equally deplorable acts . . . were a blot on the fair face of the Eternal City."[28] For the orthodox emperor, Theodosius, the most serious problem was that Rome was a bastion of paganism, unwilling to give up the gods who had protected the city for over a millennium. The Christian bishop Ambrose wrote that pagan offerings offended Roman Christian senators, whose "breath and nostrils would be filled with the ashes from the altar, cinders from the sacrifice, and smoke from the wood."[29] However, simply declaring Constantinople the "new Rome" did not allow Theodosius to ignore the old Rome. It had to become Christian.

Long before Constantine accepted Christian worship as a legitimate option for Romans, there had been Christian worship in the pagan city, and the prestige of Roman Christians was enhanced by the first persecution under Nero in 64. The emperor needed scapegoats and selected Christians. Nero executed hundreds of people in the gardens of his palace near the Vatican Hill. He had Christians torn apart by wild animals and lit as torches to illuminate the night sky.[30] Nero had an obelisk standing in his circus, and Christians have always called it the "witness," since the block of granite watched the executions. This obelisk now stands in front of Saint Peter's Basilica as a reminder of those terrible days. During this persecution, the apostles Peter and Paul reputedly died, adding their martyrdom to the prestige of the city.

In accordance with Roman custom, the dead, which were seen as polluting, were buried outside the city walls. As the pagan Celsus succinctly explained, "corpses should be disposed of like dung, for dung they are."[31] Christians, on the other hand, impressed with the resilience of martyrs from the first few centuries (and raised on elaborate accounts of the miraculous strength of the holy dead) had begun to change their views of Christian remains. A third-century text articulates the changed view: "We Christians do not abominate a dead man because we know he will live again. Assembling in cemeteries, we offer up on the graves themselves the Eucharist."[32] Roman Christians gathered at the cemeteries outside the city where Peter and Paul were reputedly buried, and they came together for services in the catacombs among the second-century dead.

By the fourth century, so many Christians had been accustomed to gather at the graveyard on the Vatican Hill that Constantine decided to build a basilica over the purported tomb of Saint Peter. This was a huge engineering task begun in about 320 and completed by 329, when the emperor decided to abandon Rome and build a new capital in Constantinople. A great church was laid out around the shrine of Peter, which, then as now, was covered by a baldachino, or canopy, supported by four spiral columns. To build the church, engineers had to cut away the top of the hill, moving vast amounts of earth and desecrating the ancient cemetery surrounding the saint's grave.[33] When finished, the church—the "old Saint Peter's"—was huge, accommodating pilgrims who wanted to gather and wealthy Christians who wanted to be buried as close as possible to the apostle so that on Resurrection Day they might get an early start on the next life. Today, to get a sense of the call of the holy dead, visitors to the new Saint Peter's have to go underground to the necropolis where the ancient tombs lie silent.

Early Christians had also gathered at the cemetery about a mile outside the walls to the south of the city, where tradition held that Saint Paul had been martyred. Placidia's father Theodosius decided to build a huge church over the small shrine that had grown up over the burial spot. He copied the design of Constantine's Church of Saint Peter, and it, too, became a significant gathering place, as well as important in the life of Placidia.

What did Christians hope for as they broke all precedent and gathered at cemeteries in such numbers that Constantine had to raise great shrines over the burial spaces? The answer lies in the stories of the experience of the martyrs. They seemed to have received the power of God into their bodies to permit their flesh to withstand the pain of their torturous deaths, and their remains were said to keep that power even after their spirit had departed. When Bishop Cyprian was martyred in Carthage, people spread cloths in front of him before his decapitation so they could collect and save his holy blood.[34] In 203 in Carthage, the Christian Saturus dipped a ring in his own blood before he died, giving it as a token to a guard.[35] Similar accounts proliferated, and Christians who had remnants of blood, bones, ashes, and cloth from martyrs believed they had magical talismans that brought cures and other miracles. It is no wonder that Christians stopped recoiling from what were previously considered polluted places, instead treating them as places of miracles.

It would be easy to consider the great shrines that had grown up outside the walls of Rome as the centers of the growth of Christianity, but, in fact, the real work of bringing patrician Roman families to Christ took place in private homes, led by educated, pious women. In the 380s in Rome, the wealthy family of the

Aemilii, for example, which included Paula and her daughters Eustochium and Blaesilla, adopted an ascetic lifestyle in their house, and they brought Jerome, a quarrelsome but brilliant theologian, to be their spiritual advisor. In letters that were widely circulated, Jerome made this new Christian way of life vividly attractive. It was a mode of living in striking contrast to the adultery, sorcery, and decadence that Ammianus had described as endemic to the city of Rome. Jerome supported the women in their vows of chastity, writing that they should renounce "the drawbacks of marriage, such as pregnancy, the crying of infants, the torture caused by a rival, the cares of household management, and all those fancied blessings which death at last cuts short."[36] Jerome offered more than the avoidance of the ills of everyday life that plagued many women; he also praised a life of the mind and of the spirit. His letters are full of the joy of study, the excitement of talking about texts, the comfort of prayer, and the certainty in God's will. This enthusiasm led many wealthy women in Rome to convert to Christianity.

In the ascetic households of Rome, women slowly and quietly shaped Christian life and thought, praising virginity and physical renunciations, but the public and political shaping of religion in the Christian West took place in Milan, where the imperial family had resided for some fifty years. However, Milan was also an Arian city, where Justina, Placidia's grandmother, served as a powerful guardian for her son, the emperor Valentinian II. Justina wanted to make sure Arianism prevailed, at least in Milan, in spite of the efforts of Theodosius in Constantinople.

AMBROSE BRINGS ORDER AND RELICS TO MILAN

The situation in Milan had come to a head in 373, when the Arian bishop there died. The exiled Catholic bishop was also dead. Both congregations struggled to find an acceptable candidate for the important post of bishop, and they set on Ambrose, an apparently nonpolitical but bright provincial governor. Ambrose tried to resist the call to duty but saw in his election the hand of God. He was quickly baptized and consecrated, and he embraced the Nicaean position. His first years were spent in pastoral duties, study, writing tracts in defense of virginity in support of Roman ascetic women, and holding his own against the Arian Justina. It is impossible to overstate the influence of Ambrose on the development of the Western church; he dominated the intellectual and political landscape of Milan during his tenure as bishop.

In 321, the emperor Constantine had declared Sunday to be a holiday so all Christians could attend church services, so in Milan, all Catholics gathered to Ambrose's church on Sundays. Justin Martyr in the second century explained

that Sunday was chosen not only to distinguish Christians from Jews, who worshipped on the Sabbath, but because "it is the first day when God created the world and when Christ arose from the dead."[37] Ambrose's writings on the sacraments and other instructional works reveal the details of his church services, the best available view of early church services. The gathering began with prayers and reciting psalms. The psalms were chanted as responses, with the leader reciting one verse and the congregation following with a second. Ambrose wrote hymns to enhance this section of the service with beautiful music and congregational singing. His introduction of hymns to the services began this longstanding Christian practice, and he used these compositions to attack Arianism. One of his hymns includes a description of Christ as "His only begotten, Alone before the beginning, born without being made."[38] In using hymns, Ambrose showed his pastoral wisdom, as he knew that having his congregation sing orthodox theology would surely make more of an impression than repeated reprimands. He followed this portion of the service with a sermon, and he was famous for his rhetorical flourishes in a world that admired oratory.

After the sermon, members of the congregation exchanged a "kiss of peace" on the lips of their neighbors, assuring that all were in harmony before the central mystery of the day, the Eucharist, was celebrated. Then those who were not baptized were excused and the Eucharist, or the remembrance of the Last Supper, followed. A congregant brought forward gifts of bread and wine, which were blessed at the altar with words similar to those used in many modern celebrations. As Ambrose writes, the priest then said: "On the day before He suffered He took bread in His holy hands, looked toward heaven, . . . and having broken it gave it to the Apostles and His disciples, saying: 'Take and eat of this, all of you; for this is my body which shall be broken for many." The priest then repeated the formula with the wine mixed with water, saying "Take and drink of this, all of you; for this is my blood." Ambrose wrote to skeptical celebrants that they should not think this was only plain bread and wine, for he argued that it had been transformed during the service into the real body and blood of Christ.[39]

After the celebrants shared the bread and wine, they closed with the Lord's Prayer, described by Ambrose: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."[40] The service ended, and the congregants were dismissed, though they pressed to be greeted by Ambrose before they left. The elements of this service became fixed by law by the end of the fourth century. By then the church had become a political as well as a spir-

itual center in most of the cities of the empire, and, in Milan, Ambrose showed how much authority a strong bishop could wield.

When Theodosius was proclaimed emperor in 379, Ambrose began a relationship with the new emperor that shaped the relationship between church and state for more than a millennium. The bishop demonstrated in two famous instances that the moral force of the church could be superior to the political one of the emperor. Ambrose first confronted the emperor in 383, when he forced him to rescind an order that Christians on the Euphrates frontier had to rebuild a synagogue they had destroyed. Ambrose refused to help Jews. In a second incident, he forced Theodosius to lie in front of his church in penance for losing his temper and punishing the town of Salonica for rioting. Theodosius had ordered a massacre, and Ambrose insisted on a public apology. But while Ambrose demonstrated his authority over the secular arm of government, his real genius was to bring the power of martyrs to serve his political agenda.

Ambrose's striking innovation came on the occasion of the dedication of a new church completed in 386. As part of his desire to claim Milan for the Nicaeans, Ambrose began building churches that were unambiguously orthodox, as they had never been used by the Arians. Perhaps recognizing the importance of the relics of the holy dead in Rome, Ambrose announced a miracle when he prepared to dedicate his new church. He claimed that in a dream he had been shown where two local martyrs were buried outside the city. With great ceremony, the bishop led the faithful to the space and discovered two bodies, which were identified as Gervasius and Protasius, supposedly martyred centuries before. The bones were moved and prominently displayed in his new church, where the faithful claimed they witnessed miracles of healing and exorcisms in the presence of the remains.[41]

For the first time in the West, remains were moved from their burial place, dramatically displayed, and made a conscious part of a political struggle for the city.[42] Ambrose directly disobeyed a law passed that year by Theodosius forbidding corpses to be brought within city walls for burial. The emperor was a traditional Roman, believing that it was all well and good for the faithful to gather at the shrines of Peter and Paul. However, those were decently outside Rome's walls. Ambrose claimed that remains of the holy dead, relics, were not polluting but in fact brought blessings, and he set a precedent for the bishop of the Latin West to preside over a shrine.[43] The race to move martyrs' bones to prominent positions in churches had begun, and a new celebration was added to the Christian lexicon: *translatio,* or the transferring of relics from one site to another.

There was a precedent for moving religious objects from one church to an-

other, for Constantine's mother, Helena, had brought back part of the True Cross to Rome. She also claimed to have shipped the steps up which Christ had ascended to Pilate's palace; these were installed in what is now Saint John Lateran Church in Rome. In the Acts of the Apostles, the author wrote that handkerchiefs that had been in contact with Paul's skin cured the sick (Acts 19:11–12). However, these relics were sacred objects, not body parts. With Ambrose's innovation, there came a great demand for the translation of relics, and there was discussion of the propriety of distributing body parts to different regions rather than leaving the holy dead to rest in peace. The controversy didn't last long, as the popularity of installing body parts as relics in churches proliferated. When Victricius of Rouen received some relic fragments from Ambrose, he assured his congregation that a single sliver of bone was as good as the whole body, containing the same power to heal as the martyr in heaven.[44] The stage was set for the medieval world's most famous phenomenon, the flooding of churches with relics that drew pilgrims in great numbers. Ambrose could not have predicted what he unleashed when he drew the holy dead into his political purposes.

Ambrose had an even greater, though less direct, effect on the development of church theology through his influence on Augustine, the most important theologian of the West. In 384, thirty-year-old Augustine came to Milan from North Africa. He was drawn to the court, and he came there to forward his career as a teacher of rhetoric. He also listened to the sermons of the famous bishop Ambrose, and these stimulated his intellectual search for truths in Christianity. Augustine learned to read the scriptures figuratively instead of just literally. He further studied under Simplicianus, a priest who had taught Ambrose to reconcile Platonism to Christianity and to interpret Scripture allegorically.[45] With these new intellectual tools, Augustine converted to Christianity and was baptized in the church of Milan in 387, and he wrote of how hymns in the church—Ambrose's innovation—moved him to tears.[46]

Augustine returned to North Africa and eventually became bishop, presiding at the same time that Placidia came to power. Their lives would intersect at significant points. Augustine's writings, shaped by the theology he learned in Milan, are voluminous, guiding the development of the Western church. Ambrose probably never realized what a giant Christian intellectual he had fostered in Augustine. To him, the young man was just one more Christian in a growing congregation in Milan, and Ambrose was busy devoting his attention to public struggles that transformed the Roman Empire.

With a growing faith, and with Ambrose's support, Theodosius attacked the remnants of paganism in the empire. In 391, one year after he did public penance

on the floor of Ambrose's church and the same year that he returned to Constantinople to meet his toddler daughter, Placidia, Theodosius issued a law banning all sacrifice and closing all pagan temples to the public. In the next year, he issued an even more drastic law that forbade even domestic worship of household deities and ancestors. These laws extended throughout the empire—from the city of Rome, which people believed had been protected by ancient gods for centuries, to Egypt, where people thought sacrifices ensured the rising of the waters of the Nile. These laws dealt a blow to the aristocratic pagans in Rome and beyond who had supported Theodosius during his years of tolerance.

Upper class pagans petitioned the emperor, while fanatical Christians smashed temples and shrines all over the empire. While some Romans begged for compromise in order to preserve art works and venerable buildings, Theodosius legislated even stronger intolerance. In November 392, he issued his most uncompromising law, declaring all sacrifice and divination punishable by death. All identifiable pagan symbols were forbidden, even hanging wreaths or garlands in the kitchens. Ambrose, of course, praised these efforts. He said of the emperor, "For his faith removed all worship of images and stamped out all their ceremonies."[47] Due to this legislation, the ancient Olympic games ended, and the great Olympic stadium in Greece with its ancient track that had seen so many games fell into slow ruin. It was only one of the many venerable sites that fell into disuse. The ancient world was changing with the changing of the gods.

People in the ancient world believed that the gods would demonstrate what they wanted by divine signs that revealed and rewarded truth. In short, people believed gods were on the side of those who believed correctly, and who didn't want a god on their side? Thus, Romans watched their rulers carefully to be sure a god supported their deeds, and imperial propagandists made sure to point out signs and portents of divine approval of the actions of their rulers. This attitude continued with the coming of the Christian God. However, paganism would not die without a fight.

WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON?

In 392, when Valentinian II died and Theodosius crowned the eight-year-old Honorius emperor of the West, everyone knew Theodosius would have to act against the usurper Eugenius. First came the pageantry, as Valentinian's body was brought to Milan, where it lay in state for two months, while his sisters, Justa and Grata, mourned beside it daily, weeping and praying. Then Theodosius authorized his burial. Valentinian's remains were placed in a magnificent tomb of porphyry in Milan, next to that of his elder brother and former emperor, Gratian.

A funeral mass was said, and in the presence of the grieving sisters, Ambrose came forward to deliver a touching sermon.

The death of Valentinian brought a struggle for succession to the imperial throne in the West. Little did the children know as they rode their chariot to the ceremony that raised Honorius to the purple that this coronation would launch a battle for the religious soul of the empire. Under Eugenius and his general, Arbogast, the confrontation between Christianity and paganism in Rome came to a head. Rome would not be slowly converted by wealthy women changing people's views. Instead, the struggle would take place on men's battlefields. To throw down the gauntlet to Theodosius and challenge his God, Eugenius restored pagan rituals in Rome. Great festivals, sacrifices, and games were held in 394. The Altar of Victory was replaced in the Senate House, and the old gods ruled Rome again. Ambrose left town in disgust. Theodosius prepared for war, even though his new wife Galla had died in childbirth. The emperor allowed himself only one day of mourning, then he marched off to battle.

Both sides claimed this was a holy war to determine which god was the strongest, and both received prophecies of victory. The pagans published an oracle claiming this was the end of the Christian term, and the pagan general boasted that when he returned victorious, he would draft monks into the army and turn Ambrose's churches into stables. Theodosius quickly looked for an omen of his own and sent a message to the east, urging the eunuch Eutropius to go to the desert and consult a holy monk named John, who was known to have a gift for prophecy. John promised that Theodosius would be victorious.[48]

In September 394, Theodosius marched his army through a mountain pass from the Balkans into Italy. There he could see the plain below, where Arbogast's soldiers were arrayed with their backs to the River Frigidus, the standard of Jove waving proudly over their camp. Their position was entrenched, and their line extended to the mouth of the pass, so Theodosius had no room for flanking maneuvers; he had to send his army straight into Arbogast's. On the afternoon of September 5, Theodosius launched a frontal attack. He placed Gothic troops in the vanguard, and the battle was fierce, yet they failed to break Arbogast's line. At nightfall they retreated, leaving vast numbers of Gothic dead on the field. Afterward, the Goths remembered this carnage, holding it against the House of Theodosius.

That night, Eugenius was euphoric, and Theodosius was in near-despair. He spent the night in prayer, hoping for a miracle. The next day, the battle was bitter and indecisive when, suddenly, a cyclonic wind blew down from the mountains against Arbogast's line. Soldiers were pinned by their own shields blowing against

Figure 1.2. Gold solidus of Eudoxia, ca. 400 (Photo: © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)

their bodies, dust blew in their eyes, and even their arrows blew back against them.[49] This kind of wind, known as the Bora, sometimes does rush down from the cold mountain heights in this region, but on this day of battle, all believed it was a divine wind sent by the Christian God. The wind won the day for Theodosius, Eugenius was executed, and Arbogast committed suicide. Both sides had seen this as a holy battle, and there was no doubt who won.

This victory helped Christianity defeat paganism. Although people didn't notice this effect immediately, it changed the nature of the monarchy in a way that would help Placidia come to power. The victory at Frigidus showed that God was on the side of the House of Theodosius; therefore, the justification to rule came not from military prowess but from God. People followed Arcadius and Honorius not because they were soldiers—they were not. No, they ruled because the blood of Theodosius ran through their veins.

If Theodosian men did not have to fight to rule, neither did Theodosian women. This principle is clearly manifested in the coin that was struck in honor of Arcadius's wife, Eudoxia, when she was proclaimed empress in 404 (fig. 1.2). Like the coin of Aelia Flaccilla, it shows the empress wearing the military cloak fastened with the brooch. However, at the top of the coin, is an image of the hand of God pointing down to the empress, letting everyone know that she was ap-

pointed by God. From the time of Eudoxia, all the empresses of the Theodosian dynasty used the hand of God image on their coins to show their right to rule. Throughout her youth, Placidia saw coins like these, and there is every reason to think that she, too, believed that she had God's blessing to rule.

God may have delivered the victory to the House of Theodosius, but for Placidia and her siblings, celebration of the great victory was brief. Although he was only forty-seven years old, the mighty Theodosius's health was rapidly declining. His physicians diagnosed him with dropsy, a general term that simply refers to an accumulation of fluid in the body. Today, we know that most of the time this condition is caused by heart disease resulting in raised blood pressure, a blocked vein, or kidney failure. Whatever the cause, in the ancient world it was fatal. Theodosius knew he was dying, and he sent for Honorius and Placidia to come to him.

Serena brought the two children by land from Constantinople to Theodosius's residence in Milan, where the dying man was doing what he could to put his affairs in order. Arcadius was already ruling in the East, although affairs there were really governed by eunuchs and generals. Theodosius officially declared Honorius to be emperor in the West and promoted Serena's husband Stilicho to be master of all the armed forces of the western empire. He then placed both Honorius and Placidia in Serena's care for their upbringing. Their souls he entrusted to Ambrose.

In January 395, Theodosius planned to entertain the people of Milan with horse races. By lunchtime on racing day, he felt too ill to attend and sent Honorius in his stead. While praying with Ambrose for his soul, his health deteriorated. He died that night, January 17, 395. Placidia was left an orphan at seven years old.

The court at Milan prepared a great funeral for Theodosius, which took place forty days after his death. His fifteen-year reign had transformed the empire in many ways, and the people gathered to mark his passing. Bishop Ambrose delivered the funeral oration, praising the piety, wisdom, and military success of Theodosius, claiming, with a good deal of exaggeration, that the emperor had brought security and peace once again to the empire. Ambrose reinforced the dynastic claims that Theodosius had worked so hard to solidify, reassuring the people not to worry about the death of an emperor: "He has left us his children in whom we should recognize him, and in whom we behold and possess him." The children's age was no impediment, he said, for they had faith in God and the support of the army.[50] Ambrose was right. As Placidia would discover, with God and an army, even a young woman could rule.

Observers at the funeral noted that the ten-year-old emperor Honorius wept during the eulogy for his father, but the sources do not mention the demeanor

of his little sister. Once again, as on the occasion of Honorius's coronation, the spotlight was not on her. We may be sure that she, too, wept, not only for the loss of her father but out of fear for a future in which she was to be governed by her brothers. (Ambrose died two years later, so he had little influence on the Theodosian heirs.) A new and uncertain stage of life began for Placidia as she was left in the care of Serena, the adoptive sister who now became her foster mother.

CHAPTER 2

Orphan Princess in Stilicho's Shadow

395–408

After the funeral of Theodosius, his body was slowly transported to Constantinople, accompanied by Serena, Honorius, and Placidia. Serena's children probably joined them as well, though the sources do not mention it. Once they entered the city gates, a great funeral procession accompanied the body to the Church of the Holy Apostles, the major church for the congregation of the eastern capital. The church was built by Constantine in 330 and was in the shape of the cross with gold-encrusted domes and magnificent mosaics. Constantine himself had been buried there in a sarcophagus of expensive porphyry (purple marble). In about November 395, Emperor Arcadius solemnly buried his mighty father among the imperial sepulchers in another porphyry coffin, while Serena, Honorius, and Placidia mourned his passing.

As soon as the emperor was buried, family politics again came to the fore. Who could control the sibling rivalry that had torn the Theodosian family? Who was in charge during the minority of the child-emperors? On his deathbed, Theodosius had entrusted Stilicho with the care of his sons, naming him *parens principium*, a father figure charged with all the moral responsibility Romans attributed to family patriarchs. Stilicho claimed parental authority over both of Theodosius's sons, but he was only able to assert it over Honorius, since his claim over Arcadius interfered with that of eastern advisors who wanted nothing to do with the western general.

The primary basis of Stilicho's power was his control of the army. Theodosius had placed him in charge of the military forces of the West, a title that is usually rendered *magister militum* (master of the military), though scholarly debate has led to further refinements of the exact title.[1] At the death of Theodosius, this role was significant because he had brought a large portion of the eastern armies

with him to Italy when he fought the battle of Frigidus shortly before his death. Therefore, in 395, Arcadius's advisors rightly worried about Stilicho's intentions. If he wanted to march eastward to claim control over Arcadius, he had the army to support him. However, the court in Constantinople had a powerful weapon of its own—custody of Stilicho's family and the imperial heirs, Honorius and Placidia.

In spite of his control of the army, Stilicho was not in an unassailable position. One of his main problems was that his father had been a Vandal, so many Romans considered him an outsider. Romans who were talking in the Forum and writing histories of the age constantly wondered whether Stilicho's affinity with the "barbarians" shaped his policy toward the Goths. This was a false accusation since the Goths were separated from each other by language, culture, and loyalty and, like Stilicho himself, would more likely align with Romans than they would with other Goths. In fact, if tribal leaders had to speak to each other, they spoke Latin rather than any of the various Gothic languages.[2] The Romano-Vandal general showed no favoritism to Goths, whether they were enemies of Rome or not. However, gossip never relied on facts, and accusations of bias swirled around his rule. Orosius, Stilicho's contemporary, wrote, "Stilicho, sprung from the Vandals, an unwarlike, greedy, treacherous and crafty race,"[3] and attributed all his errors to his Vandal background. In actuality, during his ascendancy, Stilicho constantly had to worry about invading Goths.

The Gothic problem had come to the foreground with the death of Theodosius. The barbarian tribes considered their treaties to be personal ties, and, with the great emperor dead, a new tie had to be made, But the emperors now reigning were spoiled children. The problem was compounded by the fact that during the difficult battle at the Frigidus River in 393, Theodosius had put his Gothic mercenaries in the vanguard where the casualties were horrible. The Goths felt they had been ill used by the emperor, and they chose a new leader in order to change their relations with the empire. They selected Alaric, who for the next fifteen years was Rome's greatest adversary.

Alaric was a particular threat for two reasons. First, in the wake of the carnage at Frigidus, he had been able to unite previously separate Gothic tribes under his leadership. Now, his numbers were large, his army particularly formidable, and Stilicho was in no position to challenge these troops directly, since without the Gothic mercenaries, Rome's army was undermanned. The second problem was geographical. Alaric and his people lived generally in the Balkans, the Roman province of Illyricum, the gateway through the Alps. The passes through the Balkans opened into the wide, fertile plains of the Po Valley, giving invaders a clear run at Milan, where the western emperors resided. Theodosius had come

through these passes when he fought his decisive battle at Frigidus, and everyone knew the importance of this geography to the safety of the West. Arcadius and his advisors in the East also knew how strategically important Illyricum was, and the eastern imperial court was in no hurry to cede its advantageous location to Stilicho. Arcadius liked having Stilicho pinned down by Alaric and had no interest in helping the Vandal. Thus, Stilicho constantly lived in the shadow of the Goths in the Balkans.

Stilicho's problems with Alaric began immediately after Theodosius's death in 395. The general alienated Alaric and his Gothic troops by disbanding them and sending them home. Even though they had fought bravely in the victory at Frigidus and lost many men, Stilicho believed he no longer needed them. Perhaps he thought them expensive (they were) or disloyal (probably). However, where were they to go? It was the middle of winter, and food was scarce as they went through the passes back to Illyricum and the Balkans. On his way, Alaric raided the countryside and attracted new followers. Feeling confident, he marched on Constantinople, expecting to wrest some concessions from Arcadius's court since he knew so many of the eastern forces were in the West with Stilicho. Arcadius paid Alaric to leave the city and rampage in the Balkans while waiting for Stilicho to show up.

Stilicho was in a difficult position at this point. He could not leave Alaric's challenge unanswered or his credibility as a guardian of Rome would be lost, and he had control of both eastern and western legions, so his military position was stronger than Alaric's. His error was in underestimating the degree to which Arcadius's court worried about his power; perhaps he even thought Arcadius would welcome him as a savior if he defeated Alaric. Stilicho assembled his armies and marched against Alaric in about September 395.

The campaign started well. Stilicho advanced deep into the Balkans and confronted Alaric in Macedonia. The Gothic forces fled, and Stilicho pursued them, surrounding them in Greece. This was the time to destroy Alaric's forces once and for all, but the eastern court intervened. Arcadius's advisor Rufinus persuaded the emperor to send a message to Stilicho, telling him to lift the siege immediately and return the eastern troops to Arcadius. Stilicho complied, and Alaric escaped. Why did Stilicho agree? Militarily, he was in a position to defeat Alaric (perhaps),[4] but Serena and his family were in Constantinople, and that ensured Stilicho's compliance. Serena corresponded with him throughout this time,[5] and she obviously did not feel safe enough for Stilicho to defy the political power of Rufinus.

Stilicho sent the eastern troops back to Constantinople under the leadership of the Gothic general Gainas, but Stilicho got revenge for the insult from Rufinus.

As the returning troops approached the city, Emperor Arcadius and Rufinus came out of the gates to them at Hebdomon, on the field of Mars where Honorius had been raised to emperor. Rufinus had little time to enjoy his success because the troops, under the leadership of Gainas, surrounded the imperial group and killed Rufinus. The troops paraded his decapitated head through the city, where he was mocked for his greed and overreaching power.[6] The frightened Arcadius, who seldom ventured outside his palace, retreated once again behind its walls. The poet Claudian claims Stilicho was responsible for Rufinus's death,[7] and that was probably true. However, the person who benefitted most was the eastern eunuch Eutropius, who replaced Rufinus as Arcadius's puppet master, and it is possible that Serena had made an agreement with Eutropius to allow them to leave Constantinople once Rufinus had fallen.

The upshot of the situation was that Stilicho withdrew to Italy with weakened forces, and Serena returned safely to Milan with the children. A strengthened Alaric stayed in the Balkans and continued to raid the locals and threaten the passes into Italy. Stilicho had to conduct all his subsequent moves with one eye on his rival in the Balkans, and the conflict between the two generals did not end in 395.

Stilicho effectively ruled in the West for the next thirteen years. Throughout that time, he had to confront the same problems that had preoccupied Theodosius (and every emperor from the previous century). First, he had to keep the emperor secure from competing claimants to the throne. Second, he had to keep the empire secure from invading tribes. Third, he had to think of the future of the Theodosian dynasty by securing heirs. Stilicho had the additional problem of keeping himself safe from competing claimants; there were plenty of generals who felt themselves capable of leading the armies of Rome, and plenty of Romans who thought they could control a young, compliant emperor. It is a wonder that Stilicho was able to negotiate these military and political problems for so long, and it is not surprising that historians both ancient and modern have questioned his abilities and actions. But, at the beginning of 396, things looked promising for the House of Theodosius.

SAFE IN MILAN

Bishop Ambrose had successfully used the translation of relics to forward political aims some years earlier, so perhaps it is not surprising that shortly after Serena, Honorius, and Placidia returned to Milan in 396, the remains of another martyr miraculously appeared. Ambrose was visiting a garden outside the city, and there he discovered two decapitated bodies that he identified (miraculously through

divine inspiration since there was no objective identification) as that of a martyr named Nazarius, and his companion in martyrdom, Celsus. Nazarius and Celsus were supposed to have been Roman soldiers who had been beheaded in Milan sometime around the year 68 for refusing to venerate the emperor Nero. According to the account of the discovery, Ambrose found a vial of Nazarius's blood in his tomb, and it was "as fresh and red as if it had been spilt that day."[8] The discovery generated much excitement in the city. The faithful gathered around and stained their handkerchiefs with some of the blood; other blood drops were formed into a paste that Ambrose sent to fellow bishops in Nola and Brescia. The fame of the newly found martyrs spread widely, though Nazarius's blood guaranteed that he would become the more famous.

The bodies were carefully wrapped and moved to the Basilica of the Apostles, outside of Milan on the road to Rome. Ambrose himself had founded this church in 382. One of the four churches he founded in Milan, it was built in the shape of a Greek cross, a design modeled on the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. A plaque in the church describes how Ambrose had originally dedicated it to the apostles Andrew, John, and Thomas, whose relics were supposed to lie there. Once the body of Nazarius was moved to the church, a new apse was created for it, and the church was renamed as the Basilica of San Nazaro, which it remains today. As soon as the relics arrived at the church, a miracle occurred: a woman "was delivered of an evil spirit in their presence."[9]

There is much to doubt in the story of this fortuitous find. A persecution in Milan shortly after Nero's great persecution of 64 is highly unlikely to have occurred; Romans weren't persecuted for not worshiping the emperor until the third or fourth centuries.[10] That Ambrose should find these precious relics just when the city needed some sign of favor and promise at the beginning of Honorius's reign was also remarkable timing. The House of Theodosius was built on the promise of God's blessing, so the appearance of the relics of Nazarius was considered one more validation of divine approval. The faithful just said that God works in mysterious ways, and the city greeted the arrival of Honorius and the relics of Nazarius as demonstrations of a good beginning.

With this auspicious start, Serena moved into the royal household, where she could care for the two children of Theodosius along with her own three children. The court poet Claudian claimed that she loved and cared for Honorius and Placidia through their childhoods, but there is no evidence of great affection between Serena and Placidia. However, this is not a criticism of Serena. Roman mothers were supposed to be strict disciplinarians and firm tutors who educated children and prepared them to become good citizens. Affection was left to nurse-

maids, and Placidia clung fondly to her nurse Elpidia, who had come with her from Constantinople. Serena's job was to raise Placidia to have the skills she needed to be a good Roman wife. If at the same time Serena could promote her own children's fortunes, so much the better.

Honorius was easy. He seems to have been even slower and more lethargic than his ox-like brother, and throughout his reign, others ran the empire of the West in his stead. Before he died, Theodosius had urged his son to learn warfare and to lead his armies, but the boy never did. He remained controlled by soldiers and ministers his whole life, only occasionally making decisions on his own, and his incompetence stimulated the ambitions of his advisors. In Constantinople, Theodosius had adhered to local custom and staffed his household with eunuchs to raise his children. When Serena brought Honorius back to Italy, she brought not only Placidia's nursemaid but also Honorius's eunuchs.

Usually, it is hard to explore the details of ancient childhood education, but in this case we are fortunate. We know that Placidia and Serena's daughter Maria were educated together and received a strong Christian upbringing, and a letter from Jerome has survived in which he discusses how best to educate young girls in Christian households in Rome.[11] In his letter, we can glimpse the conventional wisdom about early education that Serena surely used with the young girls in her charge.

The girls first had to learn their alphabet in order to read. Jerome recommended blocks made of boxwood or ivory in the shape of the letters so that, as the girls played, they could learn the alphabet. Then, Serena was to arrange the blocks into words, then scramble the letters and have the girls reassemble them to recreate the words. He suggested that sometimes blocks with a rough surface might help students learn by engaging their sense of touch. The children were taught to write on soft wax, using a stylus to draw the letters, and Serena placed her hand on top of each child's, guiding her until she learned the proper shapes. Their education was complicated by the fact that they were taught both Greek and Latin from the earliest years, ensuring that they would be bilingual.

Placidia and Maria's education emphasized memory more than it is often stressed in modern schools. Jerome recommended that they memorize lists of prophets, apostles, and patriarchs from the Bible so that their Christian education was fostered by the memory exercises, and they were taught to sing Christian hymns and songs. (Jerome recommended that the child sing Alleluia in her grandfather's ears every time he held her whether he liked it or not. Perhaps in her Catholic household, Serena would not have had to emphasize such proselytizing as she taught her girls.) The children were also taught the rudiments of counting

and simple arithmetic. They used only what we call Roman numerals, which do not have a zero, so all but simple calculations were extremely difficult. Thus, advanced calculations—even what we now consider relatively simple multiplication and division—were left to experts, usually slaves who could use an abacus. A Roman abacus consisted of a smooth tablet (sometimes even just a wax tablet) marked by lines symbolizing units, fives, tens, etc. Each line had a series of small pebbles or balls to move up and down the lines. These tools had been used a long time, and skilled users could even compute fractions. Placidia and Maria probably just needed enough skill in numbers to read the Roman numerals and understand the overall concepts.

In the normal educational system of the late Roman Empire, boys moved on to a tutor, who introduced the students to the great literature of the ancient world, and Honorius probably followed this path. (His tutor was mostly likely a Greek slave or educated eunuch.) Girls continued at home, and if their mother was well educated, she continued their instruction. Claudian praised Maria's knowledge of Greek and Latin poetry, so Placidia and Maria must have continued their advanced work in literature. The poet claims that Serena and Maria read all the major poetic texts from Homer onward, including the love poetry of Sappho of Lesbos, whose praise of erotic love of women makes her poetry controversial even today. But during Serena's time, it was simply one more body of elegant literature designed to awaken the passions of young women preparing for marriage.[12] We can be certain that Placidia shared this curriculum with Maria, particularly since sound Roman pedagogy insisted that learning with other students stimulated excellence.

The girls read each text aloud, as all reading in the ancient world was oral. (Observers of the bishop Ambrose were stunned at his rare ability to read silently.) The books were written on scrolls made of parchment or vellum (treated animal skins), and the words were written without space between them and with no punctuation. To understand the meaning, readers had to practice putting in the proper spacing and intonation as they read aloud. This is not an easy task, so understanding texts required many hours of oral reading with a teacher correcting along the way. Placidia must have read widely because, as we shall see, she acquired a good background in the principles of Roman law, a firm understanding of the functions of an ideal ruler, and a strong sense of history. She had also absorbed well her religious studies, which guided her later in her life.

Even while they learned letters and literature, Roman girls all had to learn to "work wool," that is, spin, weave, and sew. This ability was considered the hallmark of a virtuous Roman woman, and Serena was careful to raise these girls

appropriately. We hear of one small incident that shows Placidia's skill in sewing: The princess helped Serena embroider a girth for her brother's horse, and Serena sent it to Honorius.[13] Was Serena trying to remind Placidia of her sisterly duty to her brother? If so, it did not work very well. Throughout Placidia's life, there is ample evidence that there was no love lost between the two half-siblings.

All this education for a girl was impressive, but it was only part of the story. Even when the children were very young at Theodosius's knee, they learned of the current events occurring through the empire. They heard of battles and bravery, politics and deception. This continued to be true after Theodosius's death. Placidia's and Honorius's fortunes were linked with those of their guardians, and Placidia's relationship with—and growing hatred of—her foster mother grew from the power politics of the empire guided by her guardian Stilicho.

SECURING THE BORDERS

While Serena guided the household, Stilicho turned to the military and political problems that always plagued the empire. Once he had returned the eastern troops to Arcadius, Stilicho began rebuilding his own weakened army. It was politically difficult to tax Roman senators for either men or money to augment the army, so Stilicho had to look to Goths as fighters. In 396, Alaric made a move that freed Stilicho's hand; he marched south into Greece through the pass at Thermopylae, that famous gateway in which Spartans had held back the Persian onslaught some six centuries earlier. This time, this strategic pass was easily breached (through Greek betrayal again,[14] according to one Greek source), and Alaric and his men plundered Greece at will. This meant that Alaric and his army were no longer in the Balkans, so Stilicho did not have to worry about him coming through the passes into Italy. Therefore, Stilicho could turn north for an expedition against the Goths on the Rhine. The poet Claudian claimed that Stilicho's main purpose for the campaign was to raise recruits, and he was successful. The campaign was brief, and he was back in Italy at the end of the season with hundreds of new recruits. By the next year, he was ready to turn his attention again to Alaric, who was still rampaging in Greece.

In April 397, Stilicho gathered his troops at Ravenna, the main fleet base on the Adriatic that the emperor Caesar Augustus had created in 39 B.C. The city was originally a series of islands in a marshy lagoon, but it had been built up and walled to protect the fleet. There, Stilicho loaded his troops and supplies in preparation for the voyage across the Adriatic. (The sailing season traditionally opened April 1.) The great docks of Ravenna accommodated hundreds of ships, and Stilicho probably loaded his troops on the large flat-bottomed *quinquiremes*

that had twenty-five to thirty oars on each side. Each ship held over 200 soldiers, and Stilicho seems to have planned for a short war, since he brought few supplies. He set sail with the fleet, and it took about six days for them to navigate southeast across the Adriatic and through the straits north of the Peloponnese to arrive in Corinth.[15] The length of time for such voyages reveals the problems of supply that faced generals like Stilicho: How many ships would you devote to supply versus soldiers? Assuming a short campaign, Stilicho opted for soldiers.

This time he engaged Alaric, forcing the Goth's retreat and entrapment on Mount Pholoe on the western part of the Peloponnese, but once again, politics interfered with military tactics. The palace in Constantinople continued to fear a strengthened Stilicho, and Eutropius persuaded Arcadius to send the general an order to leave Greece. This time, Stilicho did not obey, and he continued to besiege Alaric. Arcadius then issued a dramatic order: Stilicho was declared *hostis publicus*, "public enemy." His properties in Constantinople were confiscated, and he could look for no help from Arcadius; the House of Theodosius was split over Stilicho's actions. Any dream Stilicho might have had about uniting the empire under his control died. The general delayed as he tried to figure out the best political move, and Alaric used his treasure to bribe some of Stilicho's troops. The Goth escaped again, retreating to the Greek city of Epirus, and Stilicho had to raid the Greek countryside to replenish his scarce supplies before he retired to Italy.

The tension between East and West gave Alaric what he wanted—a formal position in the empire. In 397, Eutropius named Alaric *magister militum* of Illyricum, commander of all the troops in Macedonia and Thrace. The position came with good pay and gave his personal troops the benefits of regular Roman soldiers. More importantly, Alaric now had full access to armories to provide his Goths with the best Roman weapons and armor. It is doubtful that Eutropius fully realized what he had done. For the first time, a "barbarian" held two high offices, one Roman and one Gothic. Other high-ranking Goths, like Stilicho, owed their allegiance only to Rome, whereas Alaric was clearly leader of his Gothic tribe, owing loyalty not only to his troops but to their families. The next time Romans had to face Alaric's Goths, the opposing legions would be equally armed, and the troops would be fighting for their families and tribe. For a while, however, Alaric was content with everything he had gained. From 397 to 401, he lived quietly, enjoying the fruits of his new position and strengthening his army at his leisure.

Stilicho's campaign against Alaric probably only lasted two to three months,[16] but that would have seemed a long time to those remaining in Milan. Even in the Roman Empire, where the imperial post could cover over fifty miles a day to bring messages along the main routes, it could take weeks or months to bring

Figure 2.1. Diptych of Stilicho with Serena and Eucherius, ca. 395 (Wikimedia Commons)

information from the battlefields of Greece to Italy. Those at home resorted to prayer. In her concern for her husband at war, Serena approached God directly. She prayed at the Basilica of San Nazaro, where the newly discovered relics had been interred the year before. Here she seems to have made a bargain with the saint; in return for Stilicho's safe return, she promised to build up his church with money of her own. Placidia probably joined Serena at the church, because she took this message to heart, and later she, too, would bargain with God, exchanging buildings for blessings. When Stilicho returned safely, Serena satisfied her pledge. She donated precious marble to house the relics and generally embellished the church. Her generosity is recorded on a plaque that remains in the church today.

With Alaric quiet in the Balkans, Stilicho could relax a little. The borders seemed firm for a time. Stilicho and Serena were at the height of their powers, as their portrayal in the ivory plaque in figure 2.1 suggests. Stilicho is the strong soldier and Serena the elegant matron. The image also depicts their young son Eucherius, perhaps showing some dynastic hopes. But Stilicho and Serena's hopes for their son would have to wait until the general was sure that the Theodosian dynasty could continue beyond the current generation. It was time to secure the future.

SECURING THE SUCCESSION

Stilicho began to consolidate his own power and that of the House of Theodosius by arranging for Honorius to be named consul for the year 398; this was Honorius's fourth consulship. While the position of consul had become a ceremonial one, it was still important to the tradition-loving Romans. In his poem celebrating the appointment, Claudian reveals what Stilicho expected to get from this consulship.[17] The poem praises the House of Theodosius and Honorius's childhood, depicting him as worthy successor to his illustrious father. The poet again promises that the young consul will bring luck to Rome, and the poem ends by stating the real purpose of the appointment. Claudian writes, "Happy universe that shall see the first down creep over thy cheeks, and the wedding-night that shall lead forth for thee the festal torches." Claudian, as spokesman for Stilicho, announces that the boy is fourteen, the legal age for marriage, and concludes, wondering, "Who shall be consecrated to such a couch . . . ?" This was a rhetorical question; no one doubted who Honorius's bride would be.

As we have seen, the basis of Theodosian power was blood. Honorius and Arcadius ruled not because they were competent, but because they were sons of Theodosius. This justification eventually gave authority to Arcadius's wife and daughters and potentially to Placidia herself, but Stilicho was not thinking about the Theodosian women. He needed an heir from Honorius, one that would tie his family even more closely to the Theodosian bloodline. Stilicho and Serena arranged for their daughter Maria, who was twelve years old, to marry fourteen-year-old Honorius. The marriage probably took place in February 398, during the emperor's consular year.

There is no doubt that Serena and Stilicho had always planned to unite their family more closely with the House of Theodosius, but the timing of the wedding suggests that Stilicho was anxious to solidify this position. It is not Maria's young age that makes the marriage seem hasty. Upper-class Romans frequently married off their daughters at young ages; they even believed in the consummation

of pre-pubescent marriages. Some Roman physicians claimed that women only began menstruating after their bodies had been "opened" through intercourse.[18] According to custom, Maria was ready for marriage, while Honorius was the one who was a little young. While fourteen was the minimum legal age of marriage, most men waited longer. Roman physicians repeatedly warned of the debilitating nature of intercourse for men in which their loss of semen was equated with a loss of vital force, *pneuma*.[19] Intercourse was to be approached carefully, with due preparation and with no wasted effort. At fourteen, Honorius was not yet grown, and a Roman physician would have recommended against such youthful intercourse, but this was a marriage made in the interest of the dynasty, not the boy's health.

Claudian described and praised the wedding in his "Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria."[20] (An epithalamium was a traditional ode to a marriage.) In the poem, the poet addresses Honorius's youth, perhaps to quell any doubt about the propriety the bridegroom's age. He assures the listeners that it is true that the youth is "unexperienced with passion's first fever" but that the "impatient lover chafes at the delay." Claudian also notes that the wedding has been long planned, having Honorius say, "her I seek who hath long been betrothed to me," and claiming that Stilicho owed him his daughter in exchange for the emperor's support. The poet then describes the wedding in fine detail, allowing us to recapture the pageantry of the occasion.

Honorius (more likely his advisors) selected gifts to give his bride, including the ancient jewels worn by Livia, the first emperor Augustus's wife, thus linking this wedding with all those of previous emperors. These jewels were only a small portion of all the wealth she would share, for Claudian promised her that "the whole world alike shall be thy dowry."

Meanwhile, Maria prepared for her transition from child to wife. On her wedding day, she dedicated her childhood toys to the deities of the house and put them aside. Her slaves carefully parted her hair into six strands that were arranged in a complex pattern on her head, using a spearhead as a comb, which was a tradition recalling the early founding myths of Rome in which brides were captured. Maria placed a bright orange or red veil over her head, dressed in a white tunic and shoes to match her veil, and then waited at her house while a wedding procession brought Honorius to claim her.

Honorius arrived in a golden chariot amid a procession of singing celebrants. Stilicho's soldiers all wore white and surrounded him as they cheered and threw flowers over their general. They were free to enjoy a feast celebrating the wedding. Meanwhile, the bride and groom performed various sacrifices, and Maria

declared to Honorius, "I am now of your family," at which time their hands were joined.[21] The celebrants feasted until the evening came to an end. The bride was placed in her mother's arms until the groom came and tore her away, confirming again that she now belonged to the family of her husband. The couple then went amid much celebration (and bawdy songs) to the groom's house, where the marriage was to be consummated.

While the couple was celebrating at the bride's house, servants at the groom's palace were preparing the household to receive them. They hung lamps everywhere and sprinkled perfume along the hallways and "kindled a grove of Sabaean incense," the precious Frankincense from Arabia. Servants covered the bed with yellow silks imported from China and spread woven rugs from the Middle East on the floor. They tossed jewels on the bed and piled wealth around the bedroom. The wedding preparations show the wealth that came from many parts of the world, fulfilling Claudian's promise of a global wedding gift. The couple was escorted to the bed, and Claudian closed his poem with the wish that underlay all this: "may Maria's womb grow big and a little Honorius, born in the purple, [come] to rest on his grandsire's [Stilicho's] lap."

As it turned out, all this celebration and ritual came to naught. Honorius never consummated the marriage. In less than a decade, Maria became ill and died a virgin. Why did Honorius fail to do his marital duties? Perhaps he was simply too young, but we will never know for sure, for the palace and its eunuchs kept its secrets. However, in 398, Stilicho believed he had secured his position and the future of the Theodosian household. He also kept a back-up plan in case this didn't work out; he was saving the princess Placidia for his son Eucherius.

STILICHO TRIUMPHS AT WAR

As the new father-in-law to the emperor, Stilicho was at the height of his power. He spent the next year reorganizing the army to be sure he had enough forces for whatever confrontation would come next. His major innovation was to regularize his relationship to barbarian mercenary troops, which had become central to the Roman army, by hiring "federates," non-Roman units that served under their own leaders.[22] Essentially, Stilicho expanded and regularized Alaric's situation in the Balkans, so he had various tribes available to him if he needed them. This policy came with obvious disadvantages, for the once-invincible Roman army now was not so different from the equally well-armed Goths. The empire was being transformed, but in the short run Stilicho gained in power. He boldly celebrated this power by having himself named consul in the year 400.

Once again, Claudian wrote a panegyric to his patron, Stilicho, to mark the

occasion. But amid the formulaic praise of the general's victories, admiration for Honorius, and guaranteed prosperity for Rome, the poet finally includes a reference to Placidia—notably absent in Claudian's previous texts praising her brother. Serena must have known that Maria was still a virgin, so she and Stilicho introduced their back-up plan for the succession—Placidia. Claudian describes an imagined ceremonial consular robe that is woven by the goddess Minerva, who promises that on this mythical robe she "prefigured thy destined progeny, those thy children for whom the world prays."[23] The prophecy on this robe shows Maria in labor on a splendid couch with Serena worried, yet happy, at her side. A boy is born and grows to be emperor. On another section of the imagined robe, the goddess showed Eucherius, Stilicho's son. Eucherius was twelve years old in 400, but Claudian imagines him two years later, "the down of early manhood on his cheeks," exactly as the poet described fourteen-year-old Honorius at his wedding. On this imagined wedding day, Claudian describes Eucherius marrying a "daughter and sister of an emperor." This can only be Placidia. Claudian never wrote anything without Stilicho's approval, so here we glimpse Stilicho's plan to marry Eucherius and Placidia. He would have to wait two years before his son was of legal age, but his plan was clearly in place in 400. As Claudian concludes, "This house now seeks the crown in the person of either sex, it gives birth to queens and the husbands of queens." What did Placidia think of this plan? There is silence in the sources for a while, but eventually they show that Placidia did not want to marry Eucherius.

At the height of Stilicho's power—during his prestigious consular year—ominous signs appeared that worried superstitious Romans. A huge comet glowed in the sky in the spring of 400, and, remarkably, three eclipses of the moon occurred between December 400 and December 401.[24] Responding to frightened conversations in the Forum, Honorius and Stilicho allowed the pagan statue of Victory (though not the altar) to be replaced in the Senate House, appeasing pagans and alienating Christians. Many worried that the peace and prosperity promised by Claudian would be temporary, and, indeed, in 401 barbarians threatened again.

In 400, messengers came from Alaric offering to bring his armies into the service of the West. Stilicho was not secure enough to invite another *magister militum* who had his own armies into Italy, and he turned him down. Alaric then adopted the title "King of the Goths," increasing his own status and putting everyone on notice that he was a force to be reckoned with. His chance to drive that message home came in the early autumn of 401, when other Gothic tribes (Vandals and Alans) invaded the passes to the north. Stilicho responded quickly, pulling his troops from the eastern passes and quickly subduing the invaders, re-

cruiting many of them into his army. Alaric knew the passes were open, and he invaded Italy in November 401, just before the passes closed for the winter.

With the passes undefended, Alaric quickly swept into the broad coastal plains north of Trieste. The fall harvest was in, and Alaric found rich plunder in the valley of the Po River as he advanced towards Milan, threatening the court there. Claudian reported the appearance of portents and omens predicting disaster.[25] Fear swept through the court, as Stilicho was pinned down with most of the army north of the Alps, waiting for the spring to open the passes so he could return. Honorius was no soldier, so his efforts were defensive, trying to find ways to hide from Alaric. The emperor addressed pleas from Rome for protection by ordering the restoration of the Aurelian Walls, which had been erected in the third century to keep barbarians at bay. These walls that ran twelve miles around the city and in places rose to fifty-two feet were psychologically reassuring, even if there weren't enough soldiers within the city to guard such a large area. Honorius ordered that gates and watchtowers be improved, and he incorporated into the walls the tomb of the emperor Hadrian on the banks of the Tiber River. Meanwhile, he and his advisors (along with Serena and Placidia) prepared to flee north to Gaul as soon as the passes cleared.

While Alaric had Milan under siege, Stilicho returned in early spring and in a lightning attack forced Alaric to withdraw. Stilicho's first task was to secure the safety of the court, so he persuaded Honorius to abandon his plans to head north and withdraw instead to Ravenna, to the islands behind the marshes that had kept the fleet safe since the time of Augustus centuries before. Refugees from elsewhere in the Po Valley also fled to another region of islands behind marshes—Venice. These settlers would slowly build up their maritime city until it dominated the eastern Mediterranean in the centuries to come. But, in the fifth century, no one noticed these islands, and the focus remained further south, on Ravenna, the protected port that guaranteed a lifeline to Constantinople in the East. Ravenna remained the capital of the West until the fall of the western empire in 476, and it became Placidia's imperial home. Honorius's move to Ravenna confirmed that the emperor was not a military leader but a defensive figurehead who could be easily replaced by an empress as long as she, like Honorius, had a strong *magister militum* at her command.

Meanwhile, Alaric seemed to be headed toward Gaul across the Alps, fleeing west as the court went east to Ravenna. Stilicho caught up with him at the edge of the Alps near the town of Pollenta. Once again, the question arose of how to ensure that God was on one's side. The forces approached each other on Saturday, April 5, 402, the day before Easter. Alaric did not expect Stilicho to advance

on such a holy day, and the Christian chronicler Orosius claimed that Stilicho did not want to offend God by doing so. However, the general assigned his command to a pagan Roman named Saul, who aggressively attacked Alaric on Easter Sunday. Saul was winning decisively when he was killed in battle. Stilicho rallied the troops to complete the victory, driving Alaric away and taking many Gothic wives and children prisoner, including Alaric's wife.[26] The death of the pagan Saul allowed various Christian commentators like Orosius to conclude that God was on the Roman side, but they did so with reservations because they could not give support to a pagan general. Orosius and others like him claimed that the victory was incomplete, and, in fact, it was, because Stilicho once again made an agreement with Alaric instead of totally crushing him. Alaric was to withdraw again to the Balkans. Stilicho followed him to be sure he did so, and when Alaric inexplicably turned north (perhaps again seeking to go to Gaul), Stilicho fought him and defeated him at Verona. At this point, many of Alaric's troops defected to Stilicho, and Alaric crossed the Julian Alps into the Balkans, where he was quiet for the next three years.

In the coming years, Stilicho was much criticized for letting Alaric escape, but his whole career was based on a cautious use of his largely Gothic forces. However, for some inexplicable reason, Stilicho thought Alaric was safely and permanently behind the Alps again, and through Claudian, Stilicho declared to Rome that the Goths were defeated. Rome prepared for a celebration. In January 404, Honorius entered into his fourth consulship, and the city held a great triumph for the victory over Alaric. The triumph was a centuries-old tradition in which a victorious general made a ceremonial entrance into Rome while the people cheered. Stilicho had won the victory, but Roman law decreed that the triumph belonged to the general's superior, Emperor Honorius, and the young emperor took full advantage of the opportunity to claim some glory. Claudian wrote a panegyric in honor of the emperor's triumph, once again giving us fine details of the celebration.[27]

The triumph took place on January 1, 404. The harsh rain of the night before had ended, and the day dawned bright and clear. The crowds filled the whole slope between the Palatine Hill and the Milvian Bridge, and even the rooftops were crowded as people watched the procession go through the Flaminian Gate to the Palatine. The entry gate had recently been covered with marble as part of the restoration work to the walls, and the fresh marble glowed in the sunlight.

Honorius rode in the triumphal chariot, accompanied by Stilicho, who had his son, Eucherius, march in front of the chariot instead of riding. This was a shrewd bit of politics because it allowed the Roman crowds to see his son with-

out making it seem that he was claiming too much power for the young man. The subtlety did not work in the long term, for within a few years Stilicho would be accused of wanting his son to take the throne, but in 404 the general was in charge, and the boy marched in front of his father, confident of a bright future.

Honorius continued his procession to the Circus Maximus, where crowds cheered him and his family as they sat in the imperial box. The emperor presided over the ever-popular chariot races, in which contenders competed in the dangerous sport of driving teams of horses rapidly around the track, trying to bump each other into a serious accident while the Roman crowds cheered. As an additional entertainment, Stilicho had ordered some of his soldiers to demonstrate the disciplined movements that were the hallmark of the Roman army. Troops wheeled in perfect unison and executed other military maneuvers before falling on their knees and bowing their heads in obeisance to Honorius.

It was inconceivable that Placidia (now about sixteen) was not with Serena, Maria, and the other women watching the triumph, yet Claudian never mentions her in this poem. Only four years earlier, he had referred to Placidia as a potential bride for Eucherius, but in his 404 poem, there is no mention of such an alliance. Most modern writers simply treat her as a pawn, used by Stilicho as he found useful, but there is no reason to assume she was powerless. We know that she was strong-willed, and she may have refused to marry Eucherius. At this point it appears that Placidia was having a falling-out with her guardians.

Tragedy soon struck the imperial hopes of Stilicho and Serena. In 404, Honorius's wife Maria died. Many people succumbed to sickness when they moved to the swampy areas of Rome, and Maria was probably one of them. She was buried in the imperial mausoleum connected with the south transept of the Constantinian basilica of Saint Peter in Rome,[28] and she was buried with a locket, probably a gift from her husband, that sheds further light on Placidia's standing in 404. The locket was inscribed with the names of Honorius and the other members of the imperial family in the West, except Placidia. The carving in gold translates roughly as "Long live Honorius, Maria, Stilicho, Serena! Long live Stilicho, Serena, Thermantia, Eucherius."[29] Her exclusion suggests that Placidia was not a welcome member of the royal household, and she certainly was not welcomed by her brother, who ordered the locket.

The year 404 brought another loss to Stilicho and Serena. Their poet and propagandist Claudian disappears from the records, and it is likely that he died in that year.[30] There was no one who could replace that poet in composing lines that celebrated Stilicho's accomplishments and declaiming them to the crowds

in the Forum. Claudian was only thirty-five years old, but his contribution to the reign of Stilicho was enormous. The general would miss him.

Capitalizing on his popularity after the triumph of 404, Stilicho assumed his second consulship in 405. Instead of enjoying a period of peace and prosperity, however, Stilicho faced more wars from the North. In late 405, Radagaisus, another self-styled "King of the Goths" gathered a large army of Gauls and Germans and crossed the Rhine and Danube Rivers to enter Italy through the northern passes, bypassing Alaric—the other King of the Goths—in the Balkans. Stilicho raised an army and marched north, defeating Radagaisus and dispersing the remnants of his army. He captured so many Goths that the price of slaves plummeted in the Roman market. Orosius writes that the captives "were sold in droves at random for an *aureus* apiece," cheaper than cattle. The chronicler continued to say that these slaves died quickly—God's punishment for "wicked buyers" who purchased them too cheaply.[31] Leaving aside the irony of the analysis that found that God was punishing the buyers rather than the dead slaves, Orosius's account shows that Romans were shocked at the scale of the invasions. Alaric was quiet, but other Goths seemed as threatening. Many in Rome began to wonder again whose side God was on, and religion returned to the forefront in the Eternal City, even while Stilicho was enjoying victories outside the peninsula.

RELIGION IN ROME

Bishop Ambrose had died in April 397, less than two years into Stilicho's rule. The bishop was buried in the crypt of his church, today known as Sant'Ambrogio, where he lies between the remains of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius. Ambrose was replaced by Simplicianus, the priest who had been so influential in teaching both Ambrose and Augustine about reconciling Plato with Jesus. In some ways, Simplicianus provided continuity with Ambrose's tenure, for the congregation continued to sing the psalms Ambrose composed and gather in his church. Yet, the elderly bishop did not provide the authority that Ambrose had exerted; his was a gentle, intellectual tenure. Simplicianus had made a great impact on developing church thought, and without a doubt his sermons revealed his continued exploration of abstract ideas, for his surviving letters show these interests. For example, in 397, as soon as he became bishop, Augustine wrote to him, thanking Simplicianus for reading some of Augustine's works and for helping him resolve some of his intellectual controversies. In contrast to Ambrose, there is no evidence that the mild, saintly bishop had any involvement in the great political issues of the day.

Under the influence of the charismatic Ambrose and the gentle Simplicianus, Milan was solidly Catholic. The pious Theodosius had ensured that city's victory over Arianism, and Honorius and his household, particularly Serena, were faithful supporters of the church. Rome was different. Traditional Roman religion from time beyond memory had associated certain spaces with certain gods. The third-century pagan apologist Celsus had explained this reality to Christians, writing, "From the beginning of the world, different parts of the earth were allotted to different guardians. . . . For this reason, it is impious to abandon the customs which have existed in each locality from the beginning." He said Christians were ungrateful because they lived in the space of the pagan deities but offered no sacrifices. He equated that behavior with using someone's apartment and paying no rent.[32] Many Romans agreed; they would allow the Christian God to reign in Milan, but Rome belonged to Jupiter and his family of gods and goddesses.

From the beginning of the fourth century, with the reign of Constantine, Christians began slowly claiming the city by shifting its geographical focus, satisfying the Roman need to link deities with space. Perhaps the most striking example of such emphasis on space may be seen in the Holy Cross in Jerusalem church (*Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*), which was founded by Constantine's mother, Helena, in about 320. Helena wanted a place to house the purportedly precious relics she had brought back from Jerusalem, like the piece of the True Cross. She built the church around a room in her imperial palace, and she covered the floor with soil brought from Jerusalem, so Christians in Rome could actually go to Jerusalem when they visited her church. The church—much expanded of course—still draws visitors to the eastern edge of old Rome. However, this little piece of the Holy Land was not enough to convince pagan Romans that the city belonged to the new Christian god.

When the Goth Radagaisus entered Italy, Roman pagans gathered in the Forum, arguing that the Goth was powerful not because of his large army but because the old gods supported him. Orosius wrote how people said the city had been abandoned because it had forsaken the old gods and the sacred rites. The Christian writer lamented that "the name of Christ was publicly weighed down with reproaches as if a curse upon the times."[33] Christians were relieved when Stilicho won this battle, but tensions still remained over the struggle for the soul of Rome.

Part of the religious tensions in Rome can be attributed to Stilicho's political acumen. The Vandal was tolerant of Arians, which was helpful in his dealings with Arian Goths, though unpopular with Catholics. Serena and the household of Theodosius was strongly Catholic, and her patronage and support of the or-

thodox went far to alleviate Catholic anger. In fact, Serena's (and Placidia's) supportive presence in Rome in 405 when Stilicho went on campaign and Honorius returned to Ravenna served to forward the Catholic cause.

Christians, both Arian and Catholic, were also made uncomfortable by Stilicho's support of pagans. Claudian himself was likely pagan, and his frequent poetry in praise of his patron was full of classical references and appealed to traditionally pagan Romans. Even more visible in Rome was the pagan Symmachus, an influential orator and supporter of Stilicho. Symmachus had backed the usurper Magnus Maximus against Theodosius in 383 but had won Theodosius's pardon with a brilliant public apology after Maximus's defeat in 388. Symmachus was the most influential senator in Rome, and his correspondence with Stilicho shows their important continuing relationship.[34] Symmachus needed the general's patronage, and Stilicho needed the influential pagan orator to represent him in the Senate. No wonder Roman Catholics were uneasy. In modern times, we would find Stilicho's religious toleration a positive thing, and it likely did help reduce some of his opposition. However, when danger approached, each side hurried to accuse the other of alienating one god or another.

In 402, the Spanish Christian poet Prudentius weighed in with a long poem entitled "Against Symmachus." In this poem we can see the controversy that swirled in Rome. Prudentius wanted to address again the question of placing the statue of victory in the Senate House. Symmachus had argued vigorously in favor of the statue twenty years before, when Theodosius first removed it. Now, the statue was back, if only as a "work of art," but everyone knew that Romans were hedging their religious bets as the barbarian hordes crossed the Alps. Prudentius lamented that he had thought that Rome was "purged" of "pagan vice" by the legislation of Theodosius, but he noted that paganism had recently revived, and he wrote to attack this trend.[35] Prudentius reviewed the history of Rome's victories, claiming that they were won not by gods but by the strength of Rome's armies. He said the recent invasion was also turned aside by the strength of Stilicho, not by sacrifices,[36] and throughout he quoted the rhetoric of Symmachus so he could rebut the popular pagan. Prudentius's final argument was one that many fourth and fifth century Christians would make: the old gods exist, but they were powers of the underworld and not as strong as the Christian God.[37] Prudentius goes further than Theodosius had done by calling for an end to gladiator shows, and Honorius banned them sometime near 404, leaving only chariot races to satisfy the public's thirst for exciting entertainment. Symmachus did not have an opportunity to answer Prudentius, for he died in 402, leaving pagans in Rome without their most articulate champion.

The Catholic community in Rome also received an unintended boost in 402 when the court of Honorius fled to Ravenna. This action immediately reduced the influence of the Bishop of Milan, who had held such sway when Ambrose lived. This religious power vacuum allowed the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, to rise in prestige and influence. Fortunately for the Catholics, in 401 an extremely competent man was elected pope. Since it was before clerical celibacy was required, Innocent I succeeded his father Pope Anastasius I and took office just as the Roman walls were being repaired in preparation for the Gothic invasions.

Innocent I was a vigorous activist pope, corresponding with churchmen in the eastern and western portions of the empire. In doing so, he marked the papacy as a strong administrative entity, for example, reconfirming his authority over the church in the Balkans, settling disputes among priests, and strongly condemning heretics in North Africa, Spain, and elsewhere. Probably with Serena's intercession, Innocent was also able to persuade Honorius to write to the eastern emperor Arcadius concerning theological and administrative matters in the East. This pope was involved everywhere, not just in the city of Rome, and that involvement reinforced his claims of universal leadership of the church.

We are so used to seeing the splendor of Saint Peter's in the Vatican that it is easy to forget that in the fifth century the popes guided their congregations from a church near Helena's Holy Cross in Jerusalem church—Saint John Lateran (*San Giovanni in Laterano*). Emperor Constantine had acquired this land when he married his second wife Fausta, and he eventually gave Fausta's palace and its adjacent land to the popes, who have owned it ever since as the Lateran Palace. (This land is not adjacent to the Vatican, but it remains the property of the papacy, thanks to the treaty signed in 1929 that established the independence of the papal lands.) The Basilica of Saint John was dedicated in 324 and was established as the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome. It was here that Roman Christians gathered to hear mass, baptize their children, and engage in communal worship.

Saint Peter's and Saint Paul's remained sanctuaries for the holy dead, where Christians might hope for miracles or long for the next life. Saint John's was the church of power in Rome, not miracles. Innocent I, presiding in Saint John's Lateran, wielded power in the traditional Roman fashion by administration, rhetoric, and top-down authority, but he did not forget that Christianity came to Rome largely through the efforts of wealthy Roman matrons, the very same people Serena cultivated assiduously. For example, a woman named Vestina, contributed enough money for Innocent to found a church dedicated to two saints. This church, known today as San Vitale in Rome, was built in 400 and dedicated the

year after, just as the walls of Rome were being fortified. Just as in Milan, church building was used to claim the space of the city for Christianity.

From 404, Serena presided over the court in Rome while Stilicho was at war and Honorius was in Ravenna. During this time, she supported the growing aristocratic Christian community, made up largely of powerful women who presided over worship in their houses. Yet there was continued tension in the city. The pagan historian Zosimus scorned Serena's cultivation of Catholicism and her rejection of paganism. He told how Serena was cursed because when she visited the temple of Rhea, mother of the gods, she took a valuable necklace off the statue and placed it on her own neck. She wore it proudly, using vulgar language against an old woman who cursed her for her impiety.[38] Serena was following Theodosius in stamping out paganism in visible ways while she supported the growing Christian community in Rome.

In 404, Serena met the most influential woman in the Roman Christian community, Melania, descendant of two Roman families, the *gens Antonia* and the *gens Valeria*. Melania's grandmother (remembered as Melania the Elder) had been among the Roman Christians in the 360s and had abandoned her family to go on pilgrimage to Egypt and Palestine. Although Melania the Younger wanted to follow in her grandmother's pious footsteps and devote herself to chaste Christianity, the demands of Roman nobility insisted that she marry and bear children first. She married at age fourteen and bore one daughter and a stillborn son.[39] She then prepared herself to devote her life to Christ sometime in about the year 404, at the same time as Honorius's triumph. During this time, Melania first met Serena.

A long biography of Melania the Younger was written not long after her death in 439, and this detailed *Life* sheds light on the struggles of Christianity in Rome, as well as on Serena's role at the Roman court. The *Life* discusses the perceived need for the nobility to bear children, and it also indicates the tension between the desire to maintain their wealth and dispense charity. The author is harsh toward Melania's father, Valerius Publicola, who is portrayed as forbidding Melania to adopt the extreme ascetic life she longed for, but other sources reveal the elderly Roman to be educated and generous to the church.[40] Within a few years, Rome was finally converted by the administration of popes and the balanced generosity of men like Publicola. The ascetic households that had captured Rome's attention earlier generated excitement, but as a long-standing way of life asceticism did not survive in the city, remaining only in special convents that grew as part of the general monastic movements. However, the example of Melania

gained a lot of attention in Rome and brought the ascetic Christian community into the imperial circle.

While Melania's *Life* does not mention Placidia directly, it suggests reasons for Placidia's growing anger at her foster mother. Throughout the work, the biographer refers to "Empress" Serena, even though she never formally held that title.[41] This designation likely means that Serena allowed, perhaps encouraged, the use of this title, but it must have offended Placidia, who surely expected to be designated "Augusta" by this time.

Melania's biographer says that the Empress Serena had heard about Melania's piety and wanted to meet with her. Melania, demonstrating "disdain for earthly power," at first refused; she may have also been demonstrating patrician Roman disdain for such pretensions to authority, but the biographer does not say that. By early 408, however, Melania and her husband Pinian needed Serena's help. During the violent disruptions in the provinces (these included slave revolts as well as the invasions that Stilicho and his armies were confronting), Melania and Pinian were unable to sell their many properties (including their slaves). They were trying to divest themselves of their wealth so they could follow their ascetic ideals, and they decided to appeal for help to the "Empress" Serena.

The young couple understood courtly life and brought many precious gifts for Serena, as well as bribes for the "faithful eunuchs and court officers." Serena made much of Melania, embracing her, "kissing her eyes," and offered to punish Pinian's brother, who was trying to impede their new religious lifestyles. Melania turned down the offer of vengeance but asked that Serena help them sell their property. Straightaway, Serena sent a message to Honorius, who issued a decree that their possessions should be sold by imperial ministers and that the money should be sent back to Melania and Pinian. The couple was thrilled that their problem was solved so quickly, and Serena sent them home, escorted by "illustrious eunuchs" of the court, a detail that shows once again that eunuchs maintained an important role in the western court. Most Roman sources were silent about them, however, reflecting the continued Roman distrust of the eastern custom of using them.

Melania had asked Serena to purchase Pinian's great mansion in Rome, but the "empress" claimed that it was too expensive even for her. Nevertheless, Melania persuaded her to accept some of the valuable statues from the house as gifts. This incident reveals that, in early 408, Serena was at the height of her power. She could do favors for the most prestigious families in Rome, she could tell Honorius what to do, and she could enjoy the courtly life, commanding eunuchs to do her

bidding. Surely Placidia seethed at the power Serena held, but Serena and Stilicho's reign would soon end.

PLACIDIA EMERGES FROM THE SHADOWS

Stilicho, and Theodosius before him, knew that the real threat to the dynasty wasn't invading barbarians. They posed a military problem, but the real threat came from usurpers within the empire, raised on the shoulders of the army to wear the purple. This was a particular problem for Stilicho because of his nontraditional arrangement with Honorius. Stilicho controlled the army but did not possess the title of emperor; Honorius had the title but did not command the army. It is clear that Stilicho had planned to solve this problem with the marriage of Maria to Honorius, but the girl died with no children, so Stilicho's legitimacy still hung in the balance. The problem was compounded because Honorius was now in his twenties, clearly a man, so there was no reason for him to have a guardian, and Stilicho's role as a father figure no longer made any sense. It is perhaps no surprise that threats to Stilicho's power and to Serena's assuming the mantle of empress began to appear.

The first serious usurper rose in Britain. Stilicho had neglected the island while he focused on invading Goths in other regions of the empire. It is even possible that the troops in Britain hadn't been paid for some time, since the last Roman coins to appear there in great numbers were dated no later than 402.[42] British troops had named two emperors as early as 405, but the court in Italy ignored them, if they even heard of them at all. In 406, however, the situation changed. The large invasions of Goths across the Rhine and Danube that pulled Stilicho north gave an opportunity for the British troops to raise a general who could fight.

In late 406, Constantine III was declared emperor by the troops in Britain. He was a seasoned soldier in the tradition of the best of the Roman emperors, and he had the lucky name of Constantine, the fourth-century emperor who had also been proclaimed in Britain and went on to rule a united empire. Dreaming of old glory, the British army followed Constantine III across the channel and fought to a victory against the Goths crossing the Rhine. Now, Stilicho faced a real threat to both his own power and the continuity of the Theodosian dynasty.

Like any good general, Stilicho first tried to secure his back—his place in the court. He arranged for Honorius to marry his younger daughter Thermantia, thus linking his family again to the succession in the hopes that this time Honorius would father a child. The sources suggest that Stilicho was at first opposed to the

marriage, fearful that it would give his political enemies fuel to complain that he was grabbing more power. There was an additional problem with the union; Christians believed it was incestuous for a man to marry his sister-in-law.[43] Serena apparently insisted, hoping this would ensure their control over Honorius. The wedding took place, but this marriage, too, was never consummated—the sources are silent on the reasons.

Before Stilicho could turn his attention to Constantine, the usurper made great headway. As he moved through Gaul, he recruited many barbarians, and the governors of Spain recognized Constantine as the new emperor. It was particularly embarrassing for the House of Theodosius to lose Spain, its homeland, and it was also difficult for the treasury in Rome. Now Rome was collecting no taxes from Britain, Spain, and most of Gaul. As the money slowed, Stilicho became more unpopular at home. Constantine was shrewd; he wanted to show his strength without threatening Honorius himself. In this way, he hoped to be acknowledged as coemperor without having to march into Italy. What was Stilicho to do? In the face of Constantine's military expertise, Stilicho needed an army and some military support. And, as if this wasn't trouble enough, Alaric was on the move again.

Alaric sent a message to Stilicho in Ravenna demanding 4,000 pounds of gold as back pay for troops that Alaric had been paying from his own pocket. It was a huge sum, probably more than he was owed, but not so large that the Senate couldn't raise it. Stilicho needed to pay Alaric because he needed him and his troops to use against the usurper, so Stilicho and Honorius went to Rome to seek funds. The debate in the Senate clearly laid out the problem for Stilicho: Who was the greater threat, Constantine III or Alaric?[44] The vote was split, but eventually the Senate voted to send Alaric his money, and the gold was duly dispatched. However, Roman anger at Goths in general and Stilicho in particular grew. Men close to Honorius began to whisper against his general, and the emperor slowly began to doubt his champion.

As Stilicho and Honorius prepared to leave for Ravenna (leaving Serena and Placidia behind), they received a message from Constantinople bringing yet more bad news. Arcadius was dead, leaving his seven-year-old son, Theodosius II, as ruler. Honorius was now senior Augustus, theoretically positioned to exert his control over the eastern half of the empire. Stilicho, too, saw a potential gain. Here was a boy emperor who needed a strong arm and guidance, and Stilicho saw an opportunity to expand his power. Honorius and Stilicho argued over who would go to Constantinople. Honorius finally agreed that Stilicho should go, while he remained in Italy to control the army and withstand any incursion by the

usurper, Constantine. It is theoretically possible that a skillful politician might have been able to control the crises that swept the imperial household in 408, but Stilicho was not that man. He was overwhelmed.

In August 408, while Stilicho was out of town, Honorius for the first time decided to try his hand at really leading. He had listened to his latest advisor, Olympius, and was growing suspicious of Stilicho's motives. Olympius, meanwhile, was spreading rumors among the soldiers that Stilicho was planning to install his son as emperor in the East. With Stilicho and Serena away from Honorius, Olympius was able to try to stage a coup to get rid of Stilicho. He played on anti-Gothic sentiment to organize an army mutiny, and it happened just as Honorius stepped forward to try to lead.

Honorius went to Pavia to assemble the troops and prepare them to move against the usurper Constantine. At a signal from Olympius, the soldiers broke ranks and rampaged through the city, killing any supporters of Stilicho they could find. The massacre thoroughly frightened Honorius. He retreated to his palace and left the full control of the situation to Olympius, who as the chronicler Zosimus wrote, "was now become master of the emperor's inclination."[45]

Stilicho at this point could have rallied his German troops to fight the rebellious Roman soldiers, but he chose not to bring civil war to Italy. He fled to Ravenna and hid in a church, perhaps hoping to reestablish his relationship with Honorius, but the emperor, no doubt instructed by Olympius, issued an arrest warrant. Stilicho allowed himself to be taken with the understanding that the warrant was only for his arrest, not execution. However, a second letter arrived ordering his execution. Members of his guard wanted to help him escape, but he refused. He bowed his head to the inevitable—the sword of the executioner—faithful at the end to the will of the emperor he had served for so long. The reign of Stilicho closed, but the power vacuum and ensuing violence had only begun.

Eucherius, meanwhile, had fled toward Rome with some of his father's troops as soon as they heard of Stilicho's death, and the young man took refuge in a city church. Honorius repudiated his bride Thermantia, who was still a virgin, and sent her back to Serena in Rome. The arrangements Honorius made for this transfer show the change in the imperial household that had occurred through his reign. He had no Praetorian Guard that he could trust; he had no control over soldiers. Instead, he entrusted two of his eunuchs, Arsacius and Tarentius, with the twin tasks of delivering Thermantia safely and finding and executing Eucherius. They accomplished both, then had to return by sea to Honorius because Italy was in turmoil and the roads unsafe. The two eunuchs were rewarded for their success with palace titles—imperial chamberlain and his second in command.[46]

Honorius retreated once again to the comfort of his palace, surrounded by his eunuchs, leaving Olympius to quell the storm he had unleashed with the death of Stilicho. And storm there was.

Olympius's use of anti-Gothic rhetoric to take power worked at first. However, there were many Gothic federate troops in the ranks, and they had left their families back in Italy. The Roman troops in Italy turned on the families, killing the wives and children and confiscating their property. The soldiers were furious at this betrayal and resolved to join an army of revenge against Rome,[47] and they turned to Alaric, who was always ready to improve his position against the Romans. Alaric sent a message to Honorius offering peace on some terms, but the emperor refused. As Zosimus wryly declared, Honorius did everything wrong: He neither accepted the terms nor strengthened the army for an invasion. Olympius was no Stilicho, and Alaric entered Italy, raiding all the way to the walls of Rome.

Needless to say, the Roman people began to panic at the barbarians approaching the gates and the disorder in the countryside, and it was amid this chaos that Placidia stepped from the shadows of Serena's court into the forefront of the action. Zosimus describes how the people thought Serena had brought the barbarians to the city and might betray Rome to Alaric. Even the chronicler claimed that such suspicions were groundless, but that did not change the results. Serena was killed. Zosimus wrote, "The whole senate therefore, with Placidia, uterine sister to the emperor, thought it proper that she should suffer death, for being the cause of the present calamity."[48] This short phrase has led to much speculation about Placidia's role in the death of her foster mother. Some historians suggest that as a Christian and a young woman, she would never have been so cruel to the woman who raised her. Others argue that she hated her guardian and used this opportunity to get even for imagined slights. Still others imply that she was politically naïve and actually believed the rumors of Serena's involvement with Alaric. It is more likely that hers was the action of a savvy woman—her father's daughter—who saw a way to gain the power she had longed for and took it. Her action is not incompatible with her deep religious feelings; plenty of Christians executed their rivals. It seems more reasonable to take Zosimus at his word that Placidia was central in the decision.

It is likely that Placidia had her own household in Rome and supported herself with the resources that Theodosius left her. Whether she contacted a senator first or vice versa, the young princess decided it was time for Serena to go. She was sentenced quickly with no proof of any wrongdoing except, perhaps, exerting too much power. Serena was strangled, and Galla Placidia faced the next stage of her life.

The people of Rome were worried not only about Alaric's armies, but about God's will. At this point, the question of whose side God was on remained an open one, according to the ancient historians who recounted the events. The pagan Zosimus spoke for all those who lamented the irreverence for the old gods. He attributed Serena's death by strangling to the goddess Rhea, who got revenge for the theft of her cult necklace.[49] The Christian chronicler Orosius, in trying to explain the fall of the Christian family of Serena, claimed that Eucherius was killed because when courting pagan support, he "threatened to mark the beginnings of his reign by restoring the pagan temples by overthrowing the churches." The struggle for the soul of Rome that had escalated in the reign of Theodosius continued ever more violently with the death of his general. Orosius described the coming of Alaric: "that final and long-impending punishment reached the City."[50] Galla Placidia stood at the center of both struggles, and her actions helped shape the future of both political and religious Rome. But in 408, she was in her house as the barbarians were at the gates of Rome.

CHAPTER 3

Held Hostage by the Goths

408–412

With Stilicho and Serena dead and Placidia alone in Rome, there was a power vacuum in Ravenna as courtiers vied to control Honorius. The emperor's advisor Olympius was in charge in the court, but he had not been there long enough to be able to exert real authority, and he was no Stilicho. Constantine III, the usurper, had a large following in Gaul, and it looked like the House of Theodosius would not survive in the West. The most pressing problem, however, was the Goth Alaric, who, with the fall of Stilicho, marched into Italy looking for power for himself and food for his people. In 408, he had gotten to the outskirts of Rome and surrounded the city. Honorius responded to Alaric's advances in all the wrong ways; he neither granted Alaric's desire for land and a title nor adequately prepared for the war that would inevitably come from alienating the Gothic leader.

Alaric brought about 30,000 soldiers with him, and they were well armed, having been supplied during his years as *magister militum* in Macedonia, where he was able to draw on the armories of the Romans. As usual with the Goths, this was not just an army on the move. Instead, the whole clan came, expecting their leader to provide food and perhaps land. Families followed the soldiers, bringing their goods in large four-wheeled wagons pulled by pairs of oxen. The sources give no exact numbers of these camp followers, so we have to make some approximations. The ratio of combatants to noncombatants is usually calculated at about one to four or five,[1] and this is a conservative estimate when you allow for several children per family, plus the elderly. When the Goths first crossed the Danube in A.D. 376 to enter the Roman Empire, there were about 100,000 people, of which only 15,000 were warriors (a ratio of over six noncombatants to warriors). During

the years in the Balkans, Alaric's band had expanded, and he entered Italy with about 180,000 people, including families and probably about 30,000 soldiers.

It is also hard to calculate how many wagons would have accompanied the tribe. Most people would have walked or ridden horses with the moving column, but the elderly and the young had to ride in wagons. Even if we choose a rather random and conservative number of 600 wagons pulled by 1,200 oxen, it still represents a massive movement of peoples. The train would have stretched almost three miles from beginning to end, with soldiers riding alongside to protect the column.

Archaeological excavations of grave goods in the Gothic homeland in the Balkans gives some idea of the kinds of things Alaric's people brought in the wagons. There were pottery bowls that served for eating and drinking, iron tools and axes, and ceramic storage jars, some of which were the pitcher-shaped jars made by the Goths and some of which were Roman amphorae. Personal items—cloaks, furs, and the ubiquitous Gothic bone combs for their long hair—completed the list.[2] Along with these items, the Goths carried food, and they also left some space in the wagons for the booty they expected to acquire along the way. Given the limited storage space, they were never able to carry all the food they needed, so, as they moved, they raided the countryside for food and for forage for cattle, horses, goats, sheep, and sometimes pigs. It was not surprising that Alaric moved in August when the harvest was beginning and there was plenty of food to forage, even as Italians hid what they could from the band of human locusts.

Through the month of October 408, Alaric led his people into Italy, crossing the wide valley of the Po River toward Bologna, bypassing Ravenna where the court stayed behind its protective marshes. Then the Goths moved south along the Adriatic coast road to Ancona before turning west toward Rome. Alaric kept his people on the roads as much as possible to move the wagons more smoothly and to keep them from getting bogged down in the mud. The weather is beautiful in Italy in October, and Alaric was able to move relatively quickly toward Rome, traveling almost ten miles a day.

Although the Romans did not have legions available to attack Alaric at this point, he still had to be vigilant. When Roman legions were on the march, every time they stopped at night they built a fortified camp, including a walled barricade to circle the encampment. The Goths, too, needed protection at night, so they used their traditional method of circling their wagons to create what the Romans called "wagon-forts."

It is hard to imagine the Gothic technique of circling so many wagons; they

must have had several circles, or perhaps they circled the wagons two deep. Two hundred and fifty wagons arranged in a circle would have covered an area of almost 800,000 square feet with a diameter of almost 800 feet.[3] Such a circle could manageably accommodate half of the tribe and their animals. The historian Ammianus Marcellinus described a wagon-fort that the Romans encountered early in the fourth century: "the whole host was crowded together inside its ring fence in noisy commotion and fierce excitement." In this instance, the Goths stayed inside their wagon-fort for five days until they could get an advantage over the surrounding Romans,[4] showing how formidable the circles proved to be. Alaric's Goths gathered in their wagon-forts at night, built fires, talked, rested, and began the movement again the next day.

The limiting factor in their movement was their need to find food for people and animals, and Alaric was always ready to negotiate with the emperor to provide for his followers. It had worked for him in the past, and he anticipated that it would work for him again. In October 408, he surrounded Rome, expecting to make a deal. Within the city, the siege quickly took its toll.[5] Not only were all the gates blocked, but Alaric's troops also controlled the Tiber River, preventing goods from being delivered from the port at Ostia. At first, the people expected armies to come from Ravenna to lift the siege, but Honorius had no one to send, and hunger slowly came to Rome. As November wore on, the grain dole was reduced by half, then even further. Placidia was in her palace and probably had access to imperial storehouses, but the sources do not mention her during this blockade. Two other noble women, however, do appear, notable for their charity. Laeta, the widow of the emperor Gratian, and her mother distributed supplies from the imperial storehouse to feed the citizens, but these supplies soon ran out. As people died, disease, too, swept through the city, and the dead piled up.

Not surprisingly, some people began to turn to the gods to save them. Travelers had come from Tuscany, where they said a town had been saved from Alaric's armies because the people had prayed to the old gods, who had then sent storms with thunder and lightning to drive away the invaders. The prefect of Rome, Attalus, turned to Pope Innocent to ask him for permission to have the old priests seek help from Jupiter to save the city. Even Innocent was sufficiently concerned that he was willing to try anything, as Zosimus wrote, "Preferring the preservation of the city to his own private opinion." The pope gave them permission to perform the rites but only in private. Since private rites seemed insufficient for public salvation, the rituals were called off. Although the pagan Zosimus didn't say so, it is certain that Christians were praying in all the churches for salva-

tion, but some Romans took a more practical approach. They sent an emissary to Alaric to buy him off.

Alaric demanded a huge sum to lift the siege: gold, silver, silk robes, leather, and three thousand pounds of pepper. The total weight would come to about 42,000 pounds of goods—enough to fill about forty-two of Alaric's wagons. There was no public treasury in Rome that had this kind of money, so senators struggled to raise it, taxing all according to their wealth. That still didn't produce enough gold and silver, so they turned to the temples. The pagan chronicler was horrified at this attack on the traditional gods: "They resolved to supply the deficiency from the ornaments that were about the statues of the gods." This theft would render the gods "inanimate and inefficacious," for it was the decorations that had made them sacred. The Romans melted down the ornaments and made up the payment. Zosimus said that the statues of Fortitude and Valor were destroyed, leaving the Romans with neither strength nor courage. The Romans also sent a message to Honorius, telling him that Alaric wanted hostages to ensure the peace; Honorius agreed, and the ransom was paid to free the city.

Upon receipt of the wagons full of treasure, the Goth opened the gates and allowed the Romans to leave freely. The Tiber, too, was opened so the precious grain could arrive, releasing Rome from famine. The crisis was not yet over, however, for Alaric's people were still in Italy and had not made an agreement with Honorius for their upkeep. Furthermore, as the city gates opened, the Gothic slaves in the city all fled to join Alaric, swelling his numbers even more. In the temporary peace, Alaric withdrew his people to Tuscany where they "pitched their camps in several places." If Zosimus is to be taken literally, Alaric split his people into three groups, who settled in wagon-forts of about 200 wagons each spread across the fertile land in Tuscany. We may presume that Alaric and other nobles took over some of the large, comfortable villas that dotted the land, and there they waited out the winter months.

Tuscany, with its fertile fields and cropland dedicated to grains, was a good choice because it was considered the breadbasket of Rome. The Tuscans also cultivated olives and grapes, producing a fine local wine. By late fall, when Alaric brought his Goths to the region, the crops had been harvested, and he could count on supplies to feed his people and animals. The winter passed, and Roman and Goth alike knew that the spring would bring further campaigning as the autumn stockpiles of food ran out.

In early April, several embassies from Rome, including Pope Innocent himself, came to Ravenna to ask Honorius for help. The emperor had not fulfilled the terms of the last agreement with Alaric; no hostages had been given and no land

allocated. Romans knew that Alaric would soon return to Rome, but Honorius, no doubt listening to his anti-Gothic advisers, refused to negotiate. Now that the passes were opened from the east, the emperor sent for 6,000 soldiers stationed in Dalmatia to come to fight Alaric, and, certain of victory, Honorius was not willing to negotiate further. Though outnumbered, they boldly marched into battle. Alaric cut them off and destroyed the force, leaving only 100 alive to return to Ravenna telling Honorius of the defeat.

The news only grew worse for the emperor, because Alaric's forces were strengthened further that spring. When Alaric had entered Italy, he had sent word to his wife's brother Athaulf, who was stationed in Pannonia north of the Alps, to bring his troops and join him. Athaulf had some 10,000 horsemen under his command and joined Alaric, substantially enhancing his army. Now Alaric was in a strong negotiating position, but there was no one strong enough to negotiate with him.

The court in Ravenna had remained in turmoil since the death of Stilicho. Honorius continued to listen to his eunuchs. They blamed Olympius, who had engineered the fall of Stilicho, so the emperor exiled him. The soldiers in Ravenna revolted and took the port, demanding that the emperor appear before them to heed their demands. Of course, Honorius would never confront angry soldiers, so he just dismissed the advisors the soldiers didn't like and replaced them. Finally, a man named Jovius took power. As if these weren't troubles enough for the court, the usurper emperor Constantine was waiting in Gaul to take advantage of the situation.

Alaric's demands had begun to change. During the winter in Tuscany, he realized that even forty-two wagons full of treasure were not enough to feed his people. This time he asked for a fixed amount of gold and grain to be provided each year, and he wanted land north of the Alps and in Dalmatia. Alaric also wanted to be named *magister militum*, a title the eastern emperor had once given him. Now he wanted Honorius to employ him with the same title. Honorius could live with the annual tribute, but he could not have the Goths controlling the all-important passes into Italy, and he refused to employ Alaric. He sent back an insulting letter saying that neither Alaric nor any of his family would ever be employed by the imperial court.

The response angered Alaric, but, surprisingly, his anger cooled, and he responded with an offer that all the chroniclers claimed was a fair one. Alaric agreed to renounce any title from Rome, take provinces far from the passes on the banks of the Danube, and accept only as much annual grain "as the emperor should think proper to grant." Jovius and Honorius claimed they had sworn never

to make peace with Alaric, so they refused even this modest proposal and began to prepare for war.

Alaric again surrounded Rome and besieged the city, confiscating the great grain stores in the port of Ostia and bringing hunger once more to Rome. He had grown wise in the political ways of Rome, and in the fall of 409 he persuaded the Senate to name Priscus Attalus, the prefect of the city, as emperor. Alaric was appointed Attalus's general, and Honorius was now threatened by another usurper who controlled a large Gothic army.

The rule of Attalus introduced another element into the struggle for the religious soul of Rome. The prefect had been a pagan when he served the city, but Alaric required his conversion before he was raised to the purple. However, in spite of the large number of Catholics in the city and the influence of the Catholic pope Innocent, Attalus was baptized into the Arian church by a Gothic Arian bishop. It appears Alaric was looking for a religious revolution in Rome as well as a political one. People began to wonder if God was indeed on the side of the Arians.

Many wealthy Romans had fled before Alaric had returned, and among their number was Melania, the matron who had sought Serena's patronage. With Serena dead and Goths rampaging, Melania and her husband took sacks of wealth and went south to their estates in Sicily. Other noble Romans also fled the city to await better days in their country estates.

The notable exception to this general flight was Placidia. She remained in Rome, probably in consultation with the senators who agreed to raise Attalus to the purple. From this point on, she must have been under the de facto care of Alaric through his puppet emperor Attalus, who may have planned on marrying her to consolidate his rule. However, his rule did not last long enough. Whether Placidia remained in Rome on her own volition or through the political machinations of Attalus, she was in the center of the action.

By the winter of 409, Rome and Alaric faced the same problem—hunger. The African provinces had cut off the grain supply to the city in support of Emperor Honorius, and Alaric's year of plundering had seriously weakened Italy's capacity to feed itself. Alaric wanted Attalus to invade Africa to secure the grain supply for Rome and the Goths. Attalus may have agreed to become an Arian to rule, but he clearly was not willing to compromise Rome's food supply by turning over Africa to Alaric. A planned Africa campaign fell apart, and by early spring 410, the Goths were starving, and Alaric was out of both patience and time.

Alaric had some success raiding in the Po Valley and approached Ravenna, although the marshes kept him from seriously threatening the city. He needed

to negotiate with Honorius before another winter set in, so he had Attalus publicly stripped of his symbols of office and sent the crown and purple robe to Ravenna, acknowledging Honorius as the sole emperor. (Everyone was ignoring the usurper Constantine, who was safely ensconced in Gaul.) In response to this gesture, Honorius agreed to meet Alaric face-to-face for the first time.

The two met in a small town called Alpes, about eight miles from Ravenna. At this point, there seemed to be a real possibility for a peace treaty, since both sides were exhausted by the stalemate. This could have been a defining moment in the reigns of two men who had been adversaries for so long, but so often in history such turning points are not in the control of the major players. In this case, matters were taken out of their hands by the action of a Gothic general, Sarus, who was in the pay of Honorius. Sarus seems to have been an old enemy of Alaric and his family, and he might have run afoul of Athaulf and his band of horsemen.[6] For whatever reason, Sarus led a small force of 300 soldiers and attacked Alaric's men. The surprise attack cost Alaric considerable losses and heartened Honorius. The peace talks ended with Alaric in a rage and Honorius with misplaced optimism. The Goths headed back to besiege Rome again.

THE SACK OF ROME

It is likely that Alaric planned to try once more to force Honorius to negotiate with him by again bringing hunger to the Romans trapped behind their walls. People within the city feared not only famine but the despair that drove people to horrible acts. The church father Jerome, who was in the East when the sack occurred, heard of people driven to cannibalism: "In their frenzy the starving people had recourse to hideous food; and tore each other limb from limb that they might have flesh to eat. Even the mother did not spare the babe at her breast."[7] Such accounts of cannibalism are plausible, since they appear throughout history as a response to desperation.

This time, however, one Roman decided to save the citizens from the suffering and inhumanity that accompanies a siege. On the night of August 24, 410, the Salarian Gate in the northern wall of the city was opened from within to allow the Goths to enter. Ancient historians offer two possible sources for the betrayal. Procopius, a dramatic and inventive chronicler, claims that Alaric selected 300 brave youths from his army and offered them as slave gifts to prominent senators in the city. They were to act mildly and humbly until the appointed day, when they were to rush to the Salarian Gate, kill the guards, and open the gate.[8] This story seems far-fetched though, particularly when most scholars agree that Alaric did not want to sack the city, so he would not have planned in advance to do so. It

also presupposes naïve senators who would accept Gothic slaves as gifts after the other slaves had fled during Alaric's first blockade of the city.

A second story is a bit more plausible. Procopius also claims that the city was betrayed by a high-born woman, Faltonia Proba, who opened the gate to save Rome from the hunger and cannibalism that had struck the city during the previous blockade.[9] High-born women had led efforts to alleviate hunger during the previous blockade, so it is not inconceivable that they wanted to do so again. The sources imply that the Salarian Gate was opened in stealth in the night, but the sack of the city seems to have required a bit more planning. In the first place, a single woman could not have opened the gate. The structure was large and well guarded. At the very least, she must have come with attendants—perhaps the elusive Gothic youths Procopius mentioned or other slaves in her household. She had to have bribed the guards or persuaded them in some other way. It is also unlikely that Proba operated without consulting the other high-born women in her circle, even the imperial family who had opened their storehouses in the previous blockade and perhaps even Placidia herself.

Another argument for a conspiracy to open the gate comes from the very orderly entrance of the Goths into the city. Before the sack of the city, Alaric had warned his Goths to spare the churches of Saints Peter and Paul, both outside the city walls, and to allow those buildings to be used as sanctuaries for frightened Christians. Alaric, though an Arian was still a Christian, and he wanted to be sure not to offend God in the course of the plunder. Furthermore, Alaric told his men they had only three days to sack the city, during which they could take as much loot as they could. These announcements suggest that Alaric had to have had some advance notice of the gate's opening. With the plans in place, the great door in the Salarian Gate was raised, and the Gothic soldiers poured in, ready to claim loot to satisfy the back pay they were owed.

As soldiers entered the gate, they split up, the better to loot the city. An eyewitness, a British monk named Pelagius, described the chaos as the Goths entered the city: "Rome the mistress of the world, shuddered, crushed with dismal fear at the sound of the shrieking trumpet, and the shouts of the Goths." He wrote of the terror that gripped rich and poor alike.[10] Some soldiers stopped immediately at the palace of the historian Sallust, which stood in a garden to the right of the gate. They plundered the palace and set it on fire. Fortunately for Rome, relatively few buildings were put to the torch; Alaric's soldiers were looking for loot, not destruction. However, some other buildings were burnt, whether accidentally or intentionally.

Soldiers swept up the hills to the Forum, where they took all the gold and

precious jewels that adorned any statues of the gods and goddesses that hadn't already been stripped. They probably burned the Basilica Aemilia, the oldest building in the Forum, dating from 179 B.C. At the time of Honorius and Alaric, it was an imposing structure with marble arches that offered a sheltered place where business could be conducted. Today we can still see traces of Alaric's fire in the remnants of the marble floor. This huge conflagration no doubt let everyone see what was going on if they hadn't yet heard. Wealthy Romans tried to hide their riches and were tortured if they came into the hands of greedy Goths. Many other Romans streamed out of the city gates, going either west toward Saint Peter's on the Vatican Hill or south to Paul Outside the Walls. They took as much wealth they could carry and gathered, praying, in the large basilicas, hoping the bones of the apostles would save their lives and their money.

After the Forum, soldiers swept into the neighborhood on the Caelian Hill, where wealthy families had their villas. Amid the looting, they burned the huge house of Melania, the holy woman who had already fled to Sicily before the sacking of the city. She saw in this event the hand of God, helping her divest herself of property that was so valuable that no one could buy it.[11] Excavations of the equally fashionable Aventine Hill show traces of fires that destroyed wealthy villas in this region of the city.[12]

What is remarkable in the descriptions of the plundering of the city is not that palaces were destroyed but that Alaric's soldiers largely showed moderation when it came to religion. Orosius, for example, describes an incident that occurred when "the barbarians were rushing hither and thither through the city." A Goth encountered an elderly virgin in a church. He asked her for gold and silver, and she said she had a lot and would bring it to him. She piled up a mass of riches; he was astonished by the "quantity, weight, and beauty" of the items. However, the virgin told him that they belonged to the Apostle Peter. The Goth sent a messenger to Alaric to ask him what to do. Alaric ordered that all the treasure along with the virgin and any Christians who cared to accompany them be escorted safely outside the city to the Saint Peter's church. Orosius described with awe how the procession, guarded by Goths, marched through the whole city to cross the Tiber to the Vatican Hill, unmolested by rampaging soldiers searching for gold.[13]

Despite Alaric's attempts to keep Christians safe, sacking a city is inevitably messy, and all the soldiers did not treat the faithful with such moderation. Jerome described the fate of the celibate women living in the mansion of Marcella. The author recounts that "one of the bloodstained victors found his way into Marcella's house," where he asked the elderly matron to reveal her hidden gold. She pointed to her own coarse clothing to prove that she had no buried treasure,

but the rampaging Goths assumed that anyone living in such a mansion must have hidden wealth, so they beat her with cudgels. Jerome claims that she felt no pain but threw herself at their feet, pleading not for her own life but for the safety of her young companion Principia. The soldiers finally believed she was hiding no wealth and took the two women to the church of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, the designated sanctuary. However, Marcella died there as a result of the beating.[14]

As Goths stripped golden decorations from statues and buildings, they also took something else of value: hostages to hold for ransom. As she traveled south in the wake of the invasion, Melania used her funds to ransom hostages, including spending 500 coins to free a "distinguished woman" who had been captured.[15] Melania rejoiced in the opportunity to spend her money so freely, since her goal had been to use it up, and the Goths received a good deal of her coins in exchange for hostages.

The most important hostage they took was the princess Placidia, who was probably in her own palace in Rome but under the protection of the Goths. She was too valuable for Alaric or his puppet Attalus to risk harming her in the course of the looting of the city. Orosius claims she was taken hostage by Athaulf, Alaric's brother-in-law,[16] and it is a reasonable assumption that Alaric entrusted this valuable hostage to his kinsman. Though she was a hostage, she was well treated; as one chronicler writes, "she enjoyed all the honor and ceremony due to her imperial rank."[17]

The Goths loaded their wagons as full as they could with treasure and probably confiscated more wagons and oxen to carry it. Placidia, too, was placed in a wagon with what minimal comforts she could fit, though her silks and jewels were unsuitable for a long journey in winter in an oxcart. The sources do not say so, but she probably brought at least one slave to attend her. Alaric had acquired her not as a prisoner but as a hostage whose value would be reduced if she were mistreated, and he probably expected to ransom her quickly, hoping the emperor would give in to his demands in order to retrieve his sister. Alaric did not realize how little Honorius cared for Placidia.

Honorius and his court remained safe behind the marshes and walls of Ravenna, and Procopius tells a tale about the emperor's dismissive response to the disaster in Rome. When a messenger arrived from Rome, he reported the looting to one of Honorius's trusted eunuchs, who also happened to be a keeper of the emperor's prized chickens. The eunuch rushed into the emperor's presence, claiming that Rome had perished. The emperor cried out, "'And yet it has just eaten from my hands!' For he had a very large cock, Rome by name." When the

eunuch grasped the misunderstanding and explained, Honorius responded with a sigh of relief, saying "But I, my good fellow, thought that my fowl Rome had perished." Procopius concludes this story with the assessment, "So great, they say, was the folly with which this emperor was possessed."[18]

Alaric soon learned that Honorius was interested in neither the fate of Rome nor the fortunes of his sister. After three days of looting, the Goths abandoned the city, taking the cartloads of treasure and hostages with them, and the sources all comment on how relatively little damage the Gothic soldiers had done. Orosius noted that more of Rome had been burned during the fires under Nero in A.D. 64, and the Gauls had burned the whole city, leaving nothing in place, during their raid in 387 B.C. In fact, Orosius says that only a few years after the sack, most Romans thought that nothing had taken place.[19]

Why did Alaric leave so quickly after doing a minimum of damage? Part of the answer lay in what Alaric did not find in Rome—food. His blockade had created a famine in the city, which was why Proba opened the gate in the first place. There were no supplies for him to feed his people, so he could not linger. Alaric had besieged the city in order to hold it for ransom to force Honorius to grant him land, food, and a job. Now, he must have thought holding Placidia would have the same effect. Placidia would turn out to have an even greater value to the Goths as she began to exert her own influence on the clan. As Orosius noted years later, "as if by divine decree, Rome had given her as a hostage and special pledge; . . . she was of great benefit to the state."[20] That benefit was not realized until a few years down the road. In late August 410, Alaric's immediate problem was that he needed to move his huge clan with their carts and treasure somewhere to find food for the winter.

SEEKING LAND AND FOOD

Alaric did not head north to Tuscany, for he had devastated that land, and there was no food there. Instead, he marched south through Campania, a difficult route because of the terrain. South of Rome lay the extensive Pontine Marshes—swamps filled with the malaria mosquito. As early as 312 B.C., the Romans had built a raised road through the marshes south toward Naples and the beautiful bays that Romans then and now used for holidays. This road was the famed and much-traveled Appian Way, and Alaric led his carts along it.

It is about 130 miles along the Appian Way from Rome to Capua, Alaric's first stop, and, allowing for the Goths' previous speed of about ten miles a day, it would have taken almost two weeks to reach the small city. Alaric probably went more quickly than that over the marshes since he could not circle the wagons nightly,

instead having to leave them in a line with only the front and back of the column heavily guarded and the marshes to protect his flanks.

While the Romans did not know of the link between mosquitoes and malaria, they knew the marshes were unhealthy. Placidia, traveling in a cart with more comforts than most, probably slept with silks surrounding her bed that served as mosquito netting. While they did not make any explicit association between the insects and the disease, the nobility had long used silk bed hangings to keep their sleep uninterrupted by insects. Since the malaria mosquito bites only at night, Placidia escaped the ravages of the disease, but others did not. The sources say that many of the Goths became ill during this passage,[21] and perhaps even the mighty Alaric himself caught a fever. They probably rushed along the Appian Way as quickly as they could, looking for the healthy sea breezes and full granaries of the south.

Even with a rapid travel time, it probably took at least ten days to reach Capua, where he quickly looted the city, more for food than for wealth. He then headed further south to Naples, leaving that walled city intact, but plundering the countryside and the nearby city of Nola. By now it would have been late September, and the weather threatened Alaric's further plans, for he was hoping to cross the sea, and the shipping season was quickly coming to an end.

His wagons were loaded with treasure, but food remained a problem. He knew that the source of Rome's grain was Africa, and that abundance filled Rome's storehouses at Ostia with grain and olive oil. He apparently decided to take his people to the source of the food and settle there. He used some of his treasure to purchase ships in Naples, arranging for them to meet them at Reggio, in the toe of the Italian boot. Then he led his wagons south for the 300 miles to Reggio to prepare to embark. Even if he made rapid time through the passes and skirted the high hills, it would still have been well into October before he arrived. He needed a real break in the weather to get to Reggio in time.

Refugees, including Melania and her husband, fleeing Rome had preceded Alaric's progress to the south, and the account of the saint's life gives us some idea of the chaos that flowed ahead of the marching Goths. Since Melania's goal had always been to divest herself of her great wealth, she sold her properties in southern Italy before Alaric had started his march to the south. Indeed, once he started raiding the villas, people saw the hand of God in Melania's sales, saying, "Lucky are the ones who anticipated what was to come and sold their possessions before the arrival of the barbarians!" However, as the Goths followed her progress, she repeatedly used her money to ransom captives along the way. She and her companions caught the end of the sailing season and crossed to Sicily and

then to North Africa, where she continued selling property and giving money to found monasteries that housed some of the Christians fleeing Rome.[22] The Goths were not so fortunate in their crossing.

Alaric's people gathered on the coast in Reggio ready to cross the narrow strait, less than ten miles wide, to Sicily. Sicilians watched with fear the huge number of Goths they thought would soon cross and plunder their rich farmlands. One eyewitness claimed he saw the Goths set fire to the city, but this was probably an exaggeration.[23] Christians and pagans alike invoked God's blessing on the enterprise. As Arian Christians prayed for a safe crossing, pagans at Reggio gave offerings to a statue, probably of the god Vulcan, that they believed had guarded this region against the smoking fires of Mount Etna and the closer sparks of the island of Stromboli that constantly lit the night sky.

In this case, the pagan statue won. A storm blew up without warning and destroyed almost the whole fleet. Large numbers of Goths who had already boarded died, while those on shore watched in horror as their plans of crossing to Africa ended for the season. Alaric had to find a winter home for his surviving Goths, and the soldiers and carts once more headed north. This time they took the eastern route along the mountains, perhaps hoping to go to the heel of Italy's boot, where the plains might sustain them as they waited out the winter in the circled wagons.

By now, Placidia had traveled with the Goths for months, probably under the guard of Athaulf, and had to have become accustomed, or at least resigned, to a new Spartan lifestyle. Even though she ate better than the poorest travelers, her diet changed completely. By the campfires at night, servants made great pots of stew, using game or fish, if available, or just vegetables and grains. As the season went on, they added weeds to the pot, including flax, grass, and nettles. Sometimes Goths added hemp seeds to the fire, surrounded it with thick blankets, and inhaled the smoke to catch the whiffs of cannabis, which had been used in this way for at least 4,000 years.[24] To what degree did Placidia come to know the Goths as she sat by the fire, and did this experience change her sympathies?

Sharing food around a fire is a time-honored way to draw a community together, which is why groups who wanted to avoid assimilation, like Jews, strictly observed food taboos to keep their groups separate. A text from the early conversion of the Goths to Christianity in 373 notes the importance of eating together to form community solidarity. In this account, the Christian Sabas refused to eat with the villagers who consumed sacrificial meat, and in this way he came to the attention of the leaders of the clan and was subsequently executed.[25] In contrast, as Placidia joined Athaulf at meals, communal bonds drew them together.

Another major mark of identity is clothing. You not only are you what you eat,

you are what you wear. That is why Honorius tried to ban Romans from wearing trousers like Goths and why, some years later in North Africa, Catholics who worked for Vandals dressed in trousers to curry favor with their employers.[26] The author of the life of Melania claimed that the holy woman marked significant turning points in her spiritual progress with her clothing: she wore wool under her silk, then abandoned the silk altogether.[27] Armies and gang members across time have used clothing to identify and bond groups, and I suggest that such bonding occurs even unconsciously. Placidia probably donned leather and furs to keep warm during the difficult journey, and in doing so she drew closer to her travel companions. As we will see, when Athaulf the Goth changed his leather for silk, he marked another turning point.

Throughout the ancient world (and probably today), the major signals of cultural accommodation are language, clothing, shared food, and religion. Early on in her captivity, there is evidence that Placidia shared the first three with her captors. Although she (and Athaulf) never changed their religious loyalties—she remained staunchly Catholic and he Arian—the first three shared experiences seem to have been enough to generate some empathy between them. Later in her life, she was repeatedly accused of favoring Goths, and this closeness began during these months of travel.

As the Goths headed north to find winter quarters, further disaster struck. Near the town of Cosenza, at the fork of the Busento and the Crathis Rivers, the ailing Alaric died. He was only in his forties, but this great leader had guided his people for a long time, changing them from a war band to a large clan that stood against the power of Rome. It is not surprising that Jordanes, the sixth-century author of the history of the Goths, claimed that "his people mourned him with the utmost affection" and provided him with an impressive burial.[28] They did not want to bury him on Italian soil, for that would guarantee that his grave would be ransacked as soon as they left. They decided on a creative—indeed heroic—burial for their beloved king. They dammed the small river Busento, forcing the waters to flow down the Crathis. Then they dug a tomb in the bed of the river, burying Alaric with many rich grave goods. Once the Busento was again unblocked, the river hid his grave. The chronicler also claims that they killed the slaves who had done the work so that no one would find the tomb. It seems appropriate that this leader, who spent his life leading his people from one place to another, would end beneath a constantly flowing river.

For the Goths, however, life had to go on. The kingship of the Goths was not inherited, and, anyway, Alaric seems to have fathered only girls.[29] According to the Roman historian Tacitus, ancient Germans chose their leaders from among

their nobility and selected the best by pounding their weapons on their spears in acclamation.[30] Alaric's Goths may well have proceeded in the same way. As the men gathered along the banks of the River Busento, they pounded their shields and acclaimed as king Athaulf, Alaric's kinsman and right-hand man. Jordanes described the new king as "a man of imposing beauty and great spirit; for though not tall of stature, he was distinguished for beauty of face and form."[31]

The new leader faced the same old problems that had confronted Alaric. His people had treasure in their oxcarts but little food, and the landless clan had to keep wandering to plunder supplies. Honorius was still safe in Ravenna and had neither the inclination nor a plan to negotiate with the Goths, even for the return of his sister. Athaulf needed a new plan for his people, and it appears he got one from Placidia as they talked by the fire in the evening. The chronicler Orosius gave Placidia credit for influencing Athaulf, and there is no reason not to take him at his word.[32] Jordanes tells us that Athaulf was attracted to Placidia for "her nobility, beauty, and chaste purity,"[33] but perhaps more important was the Gothic tradition of consulting the women of their tribe. Tacitus had remarked in surprise about the respect Goths accorded to wise women, saying that the men did "not despise their counsels or make light of their answers."[34] We will see how her counsel transformed the Goths over the next few years.

Throughout the year 411, Athaulf and his Goths disappear from the sources. While the texts are silent on Athaulf's progress, they are eloquent about the misery that accompanied his passage. Throughout 411 and 412, refugees fled Italy, heading to North Africa and even to Jerusalem, where Jerome wrote of their arrival and their distress. Jerome interrupted his writings to complain about the barbarians, revealing his Roman bias by talking about "hosts of slave-men and slave-women" filling land that was once governed by Rome and lamenting that "every day beggars should arrive in the holy town of Bethlehem, who were once noblemen and noblewomen, and overflowed with riches." He complained that the monks had no wealth to help the refugees and that the labor of caring for them interrupted his work.[35]

Even by the end of 412, Jerome was still complaining that his work was stopped by the continued waves of refugees that sought hospitality in his monastery, changing its "solitude into the bustle of a hotel." Nevertheless, he opened his doors to the refugees, who came to the Holy Land "needy, naked, wounded, witnesses to the savagery of the barbarians. . . . At one time they had such power, and more wealth than they could count. Now they had come to such poverty that they were short of food and clothing."[36] Even if the absolute number of refugees was in the hundreds, which is not very high relative to local populations, it would have

strained the resources of the small monasteries in the Holy Land. Thus, this constant stream of people escaping from Italy with the coming of each sailing season kept the plight of Italy on the minds of the scholars who maintained records.

What were the courts in Ravenna and Constantinople doing as tens of thousands of Goths plundered their way slowly through Italy? For the most part, they seem to have tried to restore life and ignore the invaders. Inscriptions in Rome show that the damage to the city began slowly to be repaired. The prefect of the city completed the repairs to the Senate House in 412, and the next prefect restored the secretariat building a year later. Each year more buildings and statues were completed, and the city slowly came back to its former magnificence.[37] It would take over a decade to complete the repairs, and Honorius did not enter the city until 416, when the Goths had moved on. But the repairs indicate that life in Rome was slowly returning to some measure of stability.

Not surprisingly, the emperors issued almost no civil legislation during these years, but what is somewhat surprising is the volume of religious legislation that was issued under their names, though it was no doubt stimulated (and even drafted) in North Africa under the direction of bishops who were facing a crisis they thought was even more serious than rampaging Goths—a split in the church, called the Donatist controversy.

This Donatist controversy in North Africa had begun during the martyrdoms that had taken place under Diocletian in 304, long before Theodosius had combined Rome and Christianity. During those difficult years of persecution, some North African priests pretended to burn sacred books to save their lives, while others died. The question arose whether the former had forfeited their right to their ecclesiastical office and whether only those who had been tortured ought to be counted as Christians. A bishop of Carthage named Donatus gave his name to the schism by not forgiving those who had compromised. One would think the question would have died out with the demise of the original participants, but it did not. Two competing churches had developed in North Africa—the Donatist and the Catholic—and each accused the other of being the false church. Nothing could be done about the split until Theodosius created an official mechanism that could determine the "real" church. In 405, the court in Ravenna was persuaded to condemn the Donatist church. Laws issued in 405 repeal Donatists' previous freedom of worship and authorize them to be "punished without delay if they confess or if they have been convicted."[38]

Needless to say, many Donatists reacted strongly against such prohibitions. There were riots in the countryside and mass suicides as extreme Donatists threw themselves over cliffs or onto large bonfires to become martyrs in protest of Cath-

olic repression. Catholic Bishops like Augustine were increasingly frustrated, and their pleas were reflected in restrictive legislation. In 409, perhaps frustrated by the violence in Italy, where Alaric was at the gates of Rome, Honorius issued a law directed toward the situation in North Africa. Governors were to seek out, prosecute and confiscate the property of those involved in the controversy.[39]

However, for the next year and a half, while Ravenna was preoccupied with Alaric and the Goths, they ignored North Africa, and the Donatists became bold. Imperial laws against heresy had been suspended, and even the famous Augustine could not travel without fear of being attacked by Donatist extremists.[40] It is no wonder that Jerome included North Africa in his letter lamenting the violence that had swept beyond Italy into North Africa with the coming of the Goths.[41] Augustine and his bishops needed to bring this controversy to imperial attention again, and they were finally able to do so in 411, just as Athaulf's Goths subsided into the background, where they existed in a chronic state of pillaging and living off the land.

In 411, the bishops called a conference in Carthage to try to resolve the problem, and Augustine arranged for his friend Marcellinus, a respected Roman official, to preside. In June, even as refugees from Italy swept into North Africa, 286 African Catholic bishops gathered and joined 284 African Donatist bishops in a huge hall at a bath house.[42] The discussion was heated and vigorous, but the outcome was never in doubt. Augustine and Marcellinus had barely enough votes to condemn the Donatists, but their small majority held, and the Theodosian law code dutifully records the condemnation of the Donatists.[43] The Donatists perhaps hoped that Honorius's troubles in Italy would work in their favor, but they were wrong.[44]

It is not surprising that imperial legislation did not end the Donatist crisis in North Africa. Augustine's authority was increased and the faithful looked to his leadership, but resistance to Catholicism continued in the countryside as Donatists became even more violent and the Catholics and Augustine even more repressive. As we will see, this continued struggle affected the political future of North Africa and the intellectual future of Catholicism as shaped by Augustine.

In 411, however, the emperors celebrated anniversaries, bishops quarreled in Carthage, and refugees continued to flee from Italy and North Africa. Athaulf, probably unaware of these troubles in Africa, slowly moved north. No soldiers blocked his way, and his people slowly plundered the lands as they moved through the passes in the Apennine range to reach the wide valley of the Po River. Where were they headed, and what would they do? They needed a new kind of plan that would let the people settle somewhere and find a new philosophy for structuring

their lives. In time, Athaulf offered a new vision, one shaped by his conversations with Placidia.

The most significant evidence for Athaulf's developing ideas is not a first-hand account. It is reported by the chronicler Orosius, who claims to have overheard a friend of Athaulf's describing one of the Goth's speeches to Jerome in Bethlehem. Athaulf's ideas seemed so remarkable that they were repeated in the far eastern Mediterranean before being recorded by Orosius in Spain. In this famous speech, Athaulf said that his initial idea had been to destroy the Roman Empire—to make the entire Roman Empire that of the Goths alone and to call it, and to make it . . . *Gothia* instead of *Romania*, and that he, Athaulf, become what Caesar Augustus had once been." This seems to have been his initial plan when he took over from Alaric, going beyond the previous king's desire to make himself a Stilicho, a prosperous general to the Roman Emperor. However, he claimed his mind was changed "by the persuasion and advice of . . . Placidia, a woman, indeed, of a very keen mind and very good religiously."[45] What arguments had she made that were so persuasive?

According to Athaulf, the first thing that changed his mind was the relationship of laws and the state. Even he observed that the Goths had no experience in following laws, and as modern struggling democracies have painfully learned, a state without law does not function. As Athaulf lamented, "the Goths by reason of their unbridled barbarism, could not by any means obey laws, nor should the laws of the state be abrogated without which the state is not a state."[46] Therefore, his solution was to combine the Goths with the Romans, bringing the former into the legal tradition of the latter.

Athaulf overstated the lack of legal tradition among the Goths. Indeed, there was actually a complicated legal system that based justice on the worth of the individual to the community—later called *wergild*, or "man-gold." In the close-knit communities of the tribal society, people accepted oral traditions as laws and used violence and vengeance to bring justice when tradition failed. This was a far cry, however, from the tradition of written laws (interpreted by lawyers) that had come to dominate Rome, and in Placidia's eyes, the Goths must have seemed lawless. Athaulf seems to have taken her word for it instead of defending Gothic legal traditions.

Much of the future history of the Goths involves a slow recording of laws in a way that reconciled the old forms with Rome's written traditions, and medieval Europe represents the culmination of this synthesis. However, that was some years in the future; for Athaulf and Placidia, to bring the Goths under the rule of law seemed to mean to bring them under the rule of Roman law. This

remained one of Placidia's contributions to the intellectual and political history of the West.

Placidia may also have affected the geographic progress of the Goths. By the end of 411 or into 412, they decided to head out of Italy toward Spain. Perhaps they had heard that other barbarians—the Sueves and Vandals — had successfully claimed land in that region. Or, more likely, Placidia had told Athaulf about the beautiful land that had been the homeland of the Theodosian family. She had never been there herself, but we have evidence that she had heard it described in a way that seemed to make it a logical place for the Goths to settle. The poet Claudian had used descriptions of Spain in his panegyric to Serena, praising the Theodosian estates: "What human voice can worthily sing thy praises, Spain? Rich in horses, bounteous in crops, dowered with mines."[47] Leaving aside the hyperbole of the poet, eastern Spain was alluring. The wide, fertile valley of the Ebro River provided abundant crops, and its flow into the Mediterranean gave access to valuable trade routes. The mountains that rose on both sides of the valley sheltered villages and great estates, and it fed abundant flocks of sheep and goats, along with the horses that Claudian had praised. As Placidia described these lands to Athaulf, both were drawn westward rather than back east to the Balkans. It was perhaps this dream that brought the Goths slowly back to the Po valley preparing to head west through the passes when the weather was right.

While the Goths were on the move, they probably did not notice the vigorous intellectual activity that swirled in their wake. The sack of Rome was a dramatic incident that needed explanation, particularly since, from the time of Theodosius's sponsorship of Christianity, all events were filtered through the lens of religion. Whose side was God on in this horrible incident?

CITY OF GOD

One of the most significant things about disasters is how people explain, understand, and remember them. More quickly than people could grasp the meaning of the catastrophe, burnt buildings in Rome were rebuilt, the dead were buried, and treasures began to be accumulated. Throughout the reign of the Theodosian dynasty (and before), Romans had been looking for divine signs in every event, whether political or natural, so it is not surprising that it fell to the theologians to explain God's meaning in the sack of the eternal city. The explanations had a greater impact on the future of Western civilization than the limited destruction wrought by Alaric.

Some people's immediate reaction to the disaster was that the Romans deserved it and had earned God's wrath and punishment. The contemporary

Church chronicler Sozomenus expressed this view perfectly: "All persons of good sense were aware that the calamities which this siege entailed upon the Romans were indications of Divine wrath sent to chastise them for their luxury, their debauchery, and their manifold acts of injustice towards each other, as well as towards strangers."[48] This simplistic argument might have been suitable for Sozomenus who lived in the East and perhaps had not been welcomed into Rome when he visited, but it was completely unsatisfying for people who lived in and near Rome, who knew that innocent people had died and that everyone did not deserve punishment. The sack of the city raised the perennial question of why God allows evil to come to good people. The greatest theologian of the West—Augustine in North Africa—turned his considerable intellect to this question.

In the immediate aftermath of the destruction, Christians in the bishop's congregation complained about God. How could God let such a disaster fall on Rome and her pious residents? Why did Christians as well as pagans suffer? Augustine's sermon, "On the Destruction of the City of Rome," written shortly after the sack, tried to correct Christians who criticized God. His arguments are neither well developed nor satisfying. They fall into thee general themes. (1) The Bible gives plenty of examples of righteous people who suffered, from Daniel, to Job, to Jesus himself, so contemporary Christians should stop complaining. (2) God didn't destroy Rome the way he had destroyed Sodom, where all the inhabitants were killed. Rome was only "corrected" not destroyed, so Christians should stop complaining. (3) Finally, all earthly sufferings are mild compared to eternal punishments, so Christians should learn a lesson and, again, stop complaining.[49]

These arguments were not up to Augustine's usual standards; in the heat of the moment, he no doubt rushed to answer God's critics. If these had been his final words on the subject, this calamity would likely have fallen into insignificance, joining the other many unexplained disasters. However, over the next few years, Augustine had to confront new critics who needed more sophisticated arguments: intellectual pagans who had fled Rome and gathered in North Africa. These men were highly educated, articulate, and proud of the long Roman history of accomplishments presided over by venerable deities who had guarded their city and its empire. These men accused Christians and their "new" god of bringing destruction to their beloved, ancient city.[50] Augustine's suggestion that they stop complaining and bow to God's correction was useless.

These pagans exchanged letters with Augustine, engaging him in the great controversy of the day: Whose side was God on when the city was destroyed? For example, Marcellinus, the cultured, elderly, Roman Christian who moved in these circles (and who had presided over the Council of Carthage that had

attacked the Donatists) wrote to Augustine about the pagan claim that "great evils befall the state when Christian rulers generally observe the Christian religion."[51] However, Marcellinus knew that letters from an aging bishop would not be enough. He asked Augustine to write a book refuting their arguments. The result, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, known ever since simply as *The City of God*, casts the argument in historical and cosmic terms. To call this work influential is to understate its impact; our notions of God, politics, humanity, and theology have been shaped by this book whether we have read it or not.

By 413, Augustine had written and circulated five books of his massive work, which eventually contained twenty-two books. He began by offering the work to his dear friend Marcellinus in "fulfillment of my promise, a book in which I have taken upon myself the task of defending the glorious City of God against those who prefer their own gods."[52] By the end of the work, he has woven together an impressive summary of the intellectual accomplishments of the ancient world. Even the most educated pagans in the North African literary circles could not doubt Augustine's command of the Latin classics. Within this compendium of knowledge, how did Augustine explain the destruction of the city?

In the five books that he published first, Augustine took on Rome's venerable history to show that there were plenty of times when ancient gods did not protect their cities. Rome had been sacked before, as had mighty Troy. He began this work by demonstrating what had been proven by the history of battles since Theodosius's family had taken over: You can't tell God's plan or favor from one particular sign; the span and history of salvation is much longer than that. After Augustine circulated these books, to his annoyance, the pagan attacks did not end. As he wrote at the beginning of Book VI, "To be sure, those five books are not enough to deal with all the extravagant folly and perversity of our opponents. . . . Stupidity glories in never yielding to the force of truth," so he continued his massive work, adding philosophical theory to his chronicle of history.[53]

The core of Augustine's argument lay in the Platonism that he had learned at Ambrose's knee. Unlike pagan deities (who Augustine dismissed as demons), the Christian God did not support one earthly city over another. No, the city of God exists as a perfect city—a heavenly Jerusalem—that is not of this world but shines its light into the world so that the faithful can sometimes glimpse the perfection that exists elsewhere. In these images, readers might have pictured Plato's cave with a glowing city outside that could only be seen imperfectly in the shadows cast on the back of the cave. Augustine's metaphor is even more complex because any perfect image projected on the cave is almost completely obscured by the violence and suffering of the earthly city that surrounds us. The sack of Rome had

caused Christians to lose sight of the light cast by the City of God, which was almost completely hidden during these dark days of suffering.

Augustine sustained his historical analysis by describing how this image of a mixed world had existed throughout time. He argued that, from the beginning, the world and everything in it has been a mixture of good and evil, and the ideal, abstract, City of God is the sum of good that lies almost hidden on earth. This ideal holy city is not easily seen, nor can it be separated from the earthly city that contains it, but it is there, a jewel hidden in the dung heap of life. It is always there but always apart. As Augustine wrote, "God's City lives in this world's city, as far as its human element is concerned; but it lives there as an alien sojourner."[54] The Christian lives as a stranger in the city of the world, perhaps glimpsing the City of God within acts of kindness and holiness in the earthly city but ever longing for the pure heavenly city that is the Christian's real home. The destruction of Rome—whether it was mild or total—simply didn't matter in the grand history of a world waiting for the fulfillment of the heavenly city.

In fact, the whole question of whose side God is on becomes irrelevant, because, though God is on the side of the City of God, that city is so intermingled with the earthly city that it can't be separated. The eternal city was not sacked because the real eternal city is the City of God, existing as a stranger within Rome and within all other cities, mingled in this violent world until it appears at the end of time as the glorious City that can never be defiled.

This elegant argument did not convince every Platonist intellectual in the literary circles of Carthage, nor has it stopped people from looking for God's side in disasters and wars as they appear. The Nobel Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu was once asked, "Whose side is God on in struggles between Christians and Muslims?" His answer was that God was on the side of those who suffer on both sides of any conflict.[55] Casting this answer in Augustine's terms would mean that the comforting light of the City of God shines to ease the suffering of this world, wherever that suffering takes place. This has become the position of the church as Christians ever since have at times described themselves as strangers in this world that mixes the good with the bad, strangers that long for a perfect world.

If Augustine's intellectual heritage had ended on this abstract note, it theoretically might have provided a way for Christians and pagans to live side-by-side in cities and villages dedicated to many gods. After all, if the condition of the world is that good mingles with the evil, the enlightened with the blind, there is no particular reason to oppress those who differ with you. In wars since the beginning of historical records, cities and empires guarded by one god have fought against those guarded by another. The idea that the victorious god won was the

philosophy that Augustine was trying to change (perhaps without fully realizing it). This was the idea that had confronted the Theodosian dynasty, as armies tried to decide what side God was on, and this was the belief that fostered the continued violence in North Africa, as Donatists were sure God was on the side of their communities and Catholics argued the reverse.

Sadly, the violence of the age caused Augustine to retreat from his noble Christian Platonism to get his intellectual hands dirty with a dispute that grew out of his mingled city in North Africa. If you can't tell what side God is fighting on, by identifying the city or army under His protection, how can you know your cause is just? That is, what constitutes a just war? Augustine weighed in on this controversy with an influential analysis that justified violence in the name of God.

Since God is not on the side of one city or one army, Augustine defined a "just war" differently. He said there are three criteria that make a war just: (1) it must have a just cause; (2) the outcome must benefit both parties (he meant morally, not materially); and (3) the war must be waged under the leadership of legitimate authority, who Augustine defined as the Christian emperor.[56] Even a quick look at this list shows that it offers no moral criteria for warfare other than might makes right; if the emperor says go to war, then it is a just war. A contemporary Donatist critic, who had seen the results of the wrath of the Christian armies, wrote to Augustine with a fierce complaint: "Do you serve God in such wise that we should be murdered at your hand? You do err, you do err, if you are wretched enough to entertain such a belief as this. For God does not have butchers for his priests."[57] Augustine did not waver; he believed he was a member of the abstract city of God, so he could "correct" those who were outside. His was not the last word on "just war," but in the West it remains the basic argument for what constitutes a valid reason for going to war. The fifth-century violence brought by Goths and Donatists stimulated a theoretical construct that spawned and forgave Christian violence for centuries to come.

Athaulf and Placidia probably had no sense of the intellectual firestorm that had been unleashed by the sack of the city and the subsequent dislocation of refugees. Alaric had devastated the countryside of Greece and the East for decades, leaving no impact beyond the immediate misery of the population. Augustine's writings shaped Christian intellectual heritage for the future, but his was not the only shift in the mentality of the age caused by the Gothic dislocations. The conversations between Athaulf and Placidia were to lead to a change in the relationship between Romans and barbarians, and the first step in this direction took place in early 412, when they crossed out of Italy and actively entered the political struggles that were taking place in Gaul.

CHAPTER 4

Queen of the Visigoths

411–416

In the early months of 412, Athaulf arrived with his followers back in the Po Valley in northern Italy. They camped with their circled wagons near the western edge, by Turin, raiding for food as they prepared to cross the Alps into Gaul as soon as the passes opened. Probably in late February or early March they risked the crossing. Their most likely route was through the Pass of Montgenèvre, along the valley of the River Dora Riparia, which feeds into the Po.[1] The pass is over 4,000 feet high, and it is about fifty-five miles to the summit in Montgenèvre. The treasure-laden oxcarts must have struggled through the remaining snow, or worse, patches of mud as they took about six days to reach the top. They then followed the Durance valley down through the foothills, emerging near the city of Arles, the Roman capital of the region.

This pass was the route that Hannibal had taken from Spain through the Alps with his elephants in 218 B.C. The ancient historian Polybius wrote that it took Hannibal nine days to climb through the valley of the Durance to the summit at Montgenèvre, where he rested for two days before descending into Italy.[2] Athaulf's oxcarts moved more quickly by a few days than the elephants had done. Thus, by late March, the Goths appeared on the plains of southern France ready to take part in the violence that had been sweeping the Roman provinces for years while they had been raiding through Italy.

After the Goths crossed the Alps, they came to be known as the "West Goths"—the Visigoths—to distinguish them from the "East Goths" (the Ostrogoths), who would shape the history of Italy in the succeeding decades. From this point on in the story, I join historical convention and call Athaulf's tribe the Visigoths. We'll leave the Visigoths catching their breath in the early spring of 412 after their cross-

ing in order to follow the violence and instability in the Roman world to see what awaited the strong Visigothic army in Gaul.

DEFEATING THE USURPERS

Since the death of Stilicho in 408, Honorius's court in Ravenna had been incapable of dealing with the many crises that threatened the dynasty. The politics within the court were brutal, and a competent general had not emerged to take Stilicho's place. However, in 411, the situation finally changed. Honorius found himself a champion in Flavius Constantius, a general who had come up through the ranks and who was able to take back a military initiative.

Constantius was an experienced commander from the Balkans who had served in campaigns with Placidia's father. Like Stilicho, he had come to the West with Theodosius's army and had risen through the ranks, though the sources do not mention him as remarkable during that period. However, in late 410 or early 411, he had somehow come to the notice of the court. He took part in a conspiracy to replace the courtier Olympius, who had so disastrously advised Honorius as Alaric began his invasion. Olympius was clubbed to death, and Constantius was named *magister militum*, Stilicho's old title that Alaric had coveted and was never given.

The new general was not handsome, and, in an age that valued physical beauty, this was a handicap. When he rode his horse in public, Constantius did not sit up nobly but instead leaned forward over the horse's neck and "from this position would shoot glances sideways, this way and that, as if to show everyone, in the words of the saying, that he looked 'fit to be a usurper.'" The chronicler's description of the shifty-eyed general reflected people's fear of those who exerted too much influence over the weak-willed Honorius. His physical appearance did not help. "He had prominent eyes, a long neck and a broad head," and he looked "depressed and sullen" when he rode in public. The only positive thing that could be said of Constantius was that he was witty, charming, and entertaining at parties when he was drunk.[3] Looks aside, he quickly took charge and mobilized the Italian army for war; this was what Honorius needed more than anything else.

One might think that the newly strengthened Italian army would have taken on Athaulf and his Visigoths, who were still raiding the Po valley in 411 when Constantius took over. Instead, the general adhered to the traditional Roman strategy to preserve the reigning dynasty: take care of usurpers first, then deal with barbarians. Therefore, Constantius led the army into Gaul to displace Constantine III, who had been the usurping thorn in Honorius's side since 407. The usurper had set up his capital in the city of Arles, along the Rhône River, which

gave ready access to the passes into Italy and Spain. This had been a favorite city of Emperor Constantine I, who had built glorious baths and a fine amphitheater there. Constantine III benefitted from the symbolic character of this old city, as well as from its comfort and strategic importance.

Constantine controlled the provinces of Gaul and Spain, leaving Honorius in charge of Italy and North Africa. By 411, Britain had slipped completely away from imperial control, but the usurper wanted to secure the remaining provinces and, most importantly, their taxes. To show he was in charge, he struck coins in Arles portraying him in full imperial regalia, and he proceeded to try to establish his own dynasty. Constantine declared his son Constans to be his coemperor in 409 and sent him to Spain to secure that territory. Constans successfully took most of the Spanish provinces, then left his general, Gerontius, in charge of Spain while he returned to his father's court in Arles. However, Gerontius made a critical mistake; he did not adequately guard the passes through the Pyrenees, and barbarians swept through, seeking a homeland.

Tribes of Vandals, Sueves, and Alans came through the passes and established themselves throughout Spain, except for in the northeast, nearest the mountains, which was still held by the Romans. Constans correctly blamed Gerontius for the losses and returned to Spain to take control. Gerontius, however, was unwilling to give up his command, and, with his own army at his back, he raised a new emperor, Maximus, who may or may not have been his own son. This, of course, was the problem when generals took over as emperors, as Constantine III had done; other generals decided they could do the same. Constans fled back to his father at Arles, leaving Maximus to rule in the coastal city of Tarragona in Spain. Gerontius brought his army to besiege Arles to try defeat and replace Constantine.

This was the situation in Gaul when Honorius's new champion Constantius arrived. He first encountered Gerontius, who was besieging Arles. When the Italian troops came into view, Gerontius fled with his army back into Spain. However, the Spanish troops thought Gerontius contemptible because he had run away, and perhaps they were ready to defect to Constantius's forces. They captured Gerontius in a dramatic way that grabbed the attention of contemporary chroniclers. The troops surrounded Gerontius's house, where the general and his family had taken refuge, aided only by one faithful soldier and a few servants. Gerontius shot arrows from the roof until he ran out of them. Then the servants secretly escaped by lowering themselves down from the upper windows. At dawn, the soldiers set the all-but-empty house on fire. Gerontius saw there was no hope of escape, so he beheaded his companion soldier at his request. Then his wife

thrust herself at his sword begging for death as his last gift to her. He complied, then stabbed himself through the heart with a dagger.[4] The usurper Maximus fled, and the Spanish portion of the rebellion was over.

Constantius then turned the full force of his army on Arles, where the siege wore on for three months, while the usurper, Constantine, hoped for reinforcements from Germanic tribes beyond the Rhine. When the new troops arrived, they were defeated in a fierce battle near the city, and Constantius won the field. Constantine knew all was lost and thought only to save his life. He stripped off his imperial regalia and quickly went to a church, where he was ordained as a priest. He negotiated a safe passage from Constantius, and the gates of the city were thrown open. Constantine and his son were sent to Honorius, but they were put to death by official order thirty miles from Ravenna in September 411. Only his head arrived in the capital held aloft on a pole.

Honorius's new commander had been stunningly successful. In one campaign season, he had overturned the usurper who had challenged Honorius for years. Gaul and Spain were once again under the control of Honorius, and Constantius returned to Italy in the fall of 411. He still was not ready to deal with Athaulf's Visigoths who were at that time moving into the northwest Po Valley, ready to cross into Gaul as soon as the passes opened in early spring of 412.

Constantius was not to have the leisure to attack Athaulf. As soon as he had secured the northern provinces for Honorius, a new challenge arose—the count of Africa, Heraclian, declared himself emperor. This usurper had to be dealt with quickly because Rome could not do without African grain, which was essential to feed their own people and to buy off barbarians. Athaulf could comfortably cross the Alps in the spring of 412 because Constantius was consumed with the new crisis in North Africa.

By Christian accounts, Heraclian was a drunken, cruel, and reckless man who had abused holy women who had fled to North Africa from the Gothic siege in 410. Heraclian reportedly captured young Christian virgins and sold them to rich Syrian merchants to be wives in the East.[5] Constantius sent his trusted representative Marinus to Carthage, where he quickly beheaded the usurper as he sought sanctuary in a church. Marinus then moved to purge Heraclian's supporters, and he pursued this task with vigor. North Africa was still experiencing the violence brought on by the Donatist suppression, and Augustine blamed Donatists for using Marinus's inquiry to kill staunch Catholics. Augustine was particularly horrified because his great friend Marcellinus, who had presided over the Council of Carthage and to whom the bishop dedicated *The City of God*, was arrested and, on September 13, 413, beheaded.[6]

Augustine, who had so confidently preached on the benefits of a "just war" called by a Christian emperor even if it included civilian casualties, showed no awareness of irony when he complained about his friend's execution. He wrote to Marinus, now prefect of Africa, assuring him of his own loyalty even though he had been unable to save his friend's life. Augustine fled Carthage, claiming that he had no influence with Count Marinus; therefore he could not save any other Christians who may have been denounced by Donatists. As he wrote, "I lacked strength of heart to bear such trouble, so I left."[7] Augustine retreated to his hometown of Hippo, disillusioned with the powerful union of church and state that he had praised only a few years earlier.[8] Now the elderly bishop withdrew from public controversy for a while and continued to work on his great work, *The City of God*. Meanwhile, the violence against the Donatists continued, and in North Africa people died for their faith. There was no just war, only suffering faithful.

Marinus had stabilized the situation in North Africa, and the grain shipments once again were available to go to Italy. However, such shipments depended on harvests and shipping seasons, so through the winter of 413, were unavailable to alleviate Visigothic hunger.

Even as Constantius was defeating the African usurper, a new challenge to the dynasty arose further north in the city of Mainz on the west bank of the Rhine River. The troops stationed at Mainz raised another usurper, Jovinus, to the imperial title. He was from a noble Gallic family, but probably more importantly, he had the support of the barbarian armies of the Alans and Burgundians. Jovinus moved south immediately to take over the imperial city at Arles, and as he did so, he, like Constantine, struck coins proclaiming his legitimacy.

When Athaulf and the Visigoths crossed the Alps in early 412, Jovinus held Arles. Athaulf had to decide whether to support Jovinus or attack him to serve the cause of Honorius. Attalus, the former Roman prefect and usurper who was still traveling with Athaulf, recommended that they support Jovinus, so Athaulf began negotiations. No doubt Attalus was in no hurry to fall back into Honorius's hands after he had defied him in Rome.

Athaulf negotiated with Jovinus what would be a short-lived treaty, which he broke as soon as Jovinus appointed his own brother Sebastianus as coemperor. The sources do not tell us why Athaulf objected to this appointment, but it may have been that by now Athaulf had his eye on the purple robes of the emperor. Sebastianus's appointment announced to Athaulf that there was no place for the Goth in the imperial succession, so Athaulf turned to Honorius in Ravenna to try to negotiate a deal with him. Athaulf sent a message promising to defeat the two new usurpers and send him their heads, which was a satisfying arrangement for

Honorius. With his huge army at his back, Athaulf was as good as his word. The Visigoths stormed the city and captured Jovinus and his brother. The usurpers were sent to Narbonne and executed there by the prefect of Gaul, and their heads arrived in Ravenna in August of 413.

Having recognized Athaulf's usefulness, the court in Ravenna was finally ready to negotiate with him. It helped that the Visigoths were no longer on Italian soil, so they were less of an imminent threat, and it also helped that Athaulf controlled a large force in Gaul, where usurpers raised their own armies. However, the most significant motive for the emperor to negotiate was Placidia. Honorius had been in no hurry to get his half-sister back, but his new, successful general wanted to marry her. Constantius could be fairly well assured that any son by her would inherit the throne, since Honorius was plainly not going to sire children.

Through Constantius, Honorius made an arrangement with Athaulf. Upon the return of Placidia, the Visigoths would receive federate status and land in Gaul. In addition, Honorius promised a large supply of grain to alleviate the Visigoths' ever-present hunger. But Constantius could not quite fulfill this promise. By the fall of 413, the troubles in North Africa may have been resolved, but the grain shipments could not come in time to fulfill the agreement with Athaulf. Honorius promised to deliver the grain when it became available if Athaulf released Placidia, but the Visigoth refused. It is likely that he did not trust the emperor to keep his bargain once Placidia was back in his court, but it is equally likely that Placidia did not want to go. She did not want to marry Constantius, and by now she may have decided to link her fortunes with the Visigoths.

With winter approaching, Athaulf had to look for supplies and winter quarters, so he led his people south to the coast. The Visigoths had plenty of treasure and could purchase grain shipments once the spring season began again, but they needed a port to ensure its delivery. Athaulf first tried Marseilles, the oldest and most prosperous port city in France. Its wide bay welcomed ships from all over the Mediterranean, linking them with inland Gaul, and its residents had grown rich through trade.

Athaulf surrounded the walled city, thinking he could take it by treachery and perhaps hoping someone would open the gate, repeating Alaric's success taking Rome. Instead, when he was outside the walls, a nobleman named Boniface threw a javelin and struck Athaulf, almost killing him. The residents in Marseille celebrated and praised Boniface, as the Visigoths withdrew to their camp of circled wagons.[9] Boniface gained prestige by this deed and, in a strange turn of fortune, later became Placidia's great ally.

Before Athaulf could try to find a different winter camp, his wound had to

heal. Battlefield medicine was surprisingly good among ancient warriors. As soon as they were wounded, warriors quickly bound the wound to stop the bleeding and prevent other damage. For example, ancient Viking lore tells of one warrior who had a lung spilling out of a chest wound. He bound it up and lived to tell the tale.[10] We do not know where the javelin struck Athaulf, but the first step would have been to bind it tightly. Then Athaulf would have been taken to his camp and turned over to women, who were in charge of healing. They first cleaned the wound and the surrounding flesh. Unlike Romans, barbarians used soap that they made from boiling down lard. (Romans just used oil and water to cleanse themselves, depending on the great public baths with steam rooms and pools to complete a bath.) The ancient Germans poured water over ashes from their fires and caught the runoff to leach out the lye. Then they mixed this with melted fat, which became blocks of soap when it dried. They used this to clean the wound, and it was effective. They then covered it with healing herbs and bound it again, changing the dressing until it healed.

Once he had recovered, Athaulf tried another coastal town on the Mediterranean. He headed west to Narbonne, where he was more successful. During Roman times, Narbonne was an active port that offered the main competition to Marseille. (Centuries later, the river changed, and the port was no longer immediately on the coast.) Narbonne was also well placed for transportation inland since it was located on two major Roman roads. The *Via Domitia* was the major Roman road linking Italy to Spain, and a remnant of it can still be seen in the central square of Narbonne. The city was also connected to the *Via Aquitania*, which led toward the Atlantic Ocean through Toulouse and Bordeaux. In September 413, Athaulf took Narbonne without a fight, and he followed this with the capture of the interior cities of Toulouse and Bordeaux. Now his people were well placed to sit out the mild winter of southern Gaul, while controlling the significant trade route across the south.

During the fall of 413, when Athaulf and Placidia were in Narbonne, they came up with a new plan for their future. Instead of seeking to become a general in Rome's army, Athaulf decided to reshape the nature of the empire itself, and it is likely that Placidia had a strong influence on this decision. As Orosius wrote, "he chose to seek for himself the glory of completely restoring and increasing the Roman name by the forces of the Goths, and to be held by posterity as the author of the restoration of Rome."[11] We can tell by Placidia's actions that she either conceived of or at least supported the idea that Athaulf could be a soldier-ruler like her father and could supplant her lazy brother. The two decided to marry, and their wedding embodied the combining of Visigothic arms with the blood of the

House of Theodosius. It also saved Placidia from becoming her brother's pawn and being forced to marry Constantius.

The marriage announcement must also have meant that Athaulf's first wife, Alaric's sister, had died, freeing him to marry Placidia. She is not mentioned in the sources, and it is inconceivable that Athaulf would have alienated his Visigoths by setting aside, or even insulting, a family member of the great king Alaric. Athaulf's two daughters remained in his care.

Constantius was furious when he heard of the engagement. He insisted that Athaulf return the princess immediately. Instead, Athaulf increased the amount of grain he demanded, making it impossible for Constantius to comply.[12] Athaulf used this refusal as an excuse to proceed with their plans. The couple announced their wedding date.

A WEDDING IN NARBONNE

The wedding took place in January 414 at the mansion of Ingenius, a prominent citizen of Narbonne. Romans in these prosperous provinces had magnificent villas that rivaled those in Italy for their size and sumptuous decorations. Though archaeologists have not identified this particular villa, there have been enough excavated for us to have an idea of the setting for this wedding.[13] Guests, both Roman and Visigoth, assembled in various reception rooms spread around courtyards with plants and fountains. The rooms had mosaic floors and walls painted with elegant frescoes. (Examples may be seen in Narbonne's archaeological museum.)

The wedding was purely Roman; Placidia was married with all the ritual and opulence that had marked her brother's first wedding to Maria. She sat in state in a special inner room of the mansion, dressed in Roman imperial robes. Though the source does not say so, she likely had her hair parted by a spear and arranged in the traditional Roman wedding braids that had crowned Maria. Athaulf dressed as a Roman soldier, not as a Gothic king, making the important symbolic statement that he and Placidia planned to assume the leadership of the Roman Empire rather than set up a parallel kingdom of their own. Also significant was that Athaulf wore the *paludamentum*, the cloak worn by generals and emperors. This cloak, fastened with a precious brooch on one side, was the same mark of office that garbed Honorius when he was raised to the purple as a child, and it was the same cloak that appeared on coins commemorating emperors and empresses of the Theodosian dynasty, as well as the usurpers of the age. Placidia was going to marry no less than an emperor, and Athaulf's clothing signaled their aspirations.

Honorius and Maria's wedding had been marked by the exchange of costly

gifts that demonstrated the power and wealth of the groom. Athaulf outdid even that display. In addition to normal gifts, Athaulf gave his bride fifty handsome young men dressed in silk garments. Each carried two great dishes, one full of gold and the other full of precious stones or, as the chronicler corrected himself, priceless stones. These gifts were part of the plunder that had come from Rome.[14] Modern authors have sometimes found these gifts in bad taste, flaunting the spoils before a daughter of Rome who, herself, had been part of the booty of the conquest.[15] However, Visigoths considered plunder a particularly honorable gift; as Tacitus had said of the ancient Germanic tribes, "They actually think it tame and stupid to acquire by the sweat of toil what they might win by their blood."[16] So, Athaulf brought his most important treasure, that which he had stolen. It is likely that Placidia did not object; after all, Honorius's gifts to Maria had been booty taken from other wars. The marriage contract was sealed with treasure brought from both sides—precious wealth from Athaulf and the bloodline of Theodosius from Placidia.

After the exchange of gifts, marriage songs were sung. These were usually composed by professional poets, as Claudian had composed the epithalamium for Honorius and Maria. There were no poets of his quality in Narbonne, but three men stepped forward to compose appropriate songs to formalize the occasion. The first was Attalus, the ex-prefect of Rome and sometimes acclaimed emperor who had been traveling with the Visigoths since the sack of Rome. His high status might have made up for any inadequacy in his poetry. Two other men, named Phoebadius and Rusticus, must have been local Gallo-Romans who also sang improvised poetry. We do not have a record of these marriage verses, but they probably contained all the traditional elements that had marked Claudian's composition: praise of the passion and beauty of the couple, their noble heritage, and their accomplishments, and the hope for progeny to carry on their noble lines.[17]

The wedding concluded with traditional eating and drinking. Visigoths and local Romans celebrated together, drinking the good French wine and shouting acclamations for the newly married couple.[18] The delicacies served included desserts flavored with rosemary flower honey, which was Narbonne's most famous export to Rome. At this point, Athaulf claimed he wanted to avoid war and was "eager for peace," and, according to the chronicler, he was influenced "by the persuasion and advice of his wife, Placidia."[19] It is likely that all gathered there were hoping for peace after being so long at war and anticipating that this union would bring it about.

Accounts of this traditional Roman wedding, in which families were joined

and hopes expressed for a peaceful and fruitful future, omit any reference to religion. This omission may seem surprising, for Placidia, as a dutiful daughter of Theodosius, was deeply religious, and Athaulf was a firm follower of Arianism. Even Attalus had been forced to convert to Arianism when he decided to follow Alaric. There is no record of conversations between the couple on their differing views, and they may have just agreed to disagree on this subject. They were able to avoid the issue because the church had not yet claimed any authority over marriage; it was far from being a sacrament and was still considered to a familial and political matter.

In the fourth and early fifth centuries, church leaders were considering whether marriage and sexual intercourse were appropriate for Christians at all. As Jerome put it, "before the Fall, Adam and Eve were virgins in Paradise, but after they had sinned, and were cast out of Paradise, they were immediately married."[20] These early church fathers were against the institution that encouraged carnal intercourse, and Roman women like Melania embraced chastity along with Christianity.

Augustine was the first of the church fathers to view sexuality and marriage in a positive light.[21] As early as 401, he wrote a treatise called "The Good of Marriage," in which he claimed that the institution of marriage satisfied people's innate need for what he called "friendship."[22] It was only much later, in 419, that he began to suggest that marriage might have a sacramental component for Christians. When he wrote "On Adulterous Marriages," he said that couples who separate or divorce for whatever cause, including adultery, may not remarry, suggesting that marriage itself might be sacred.[23] However, his writings reflected only a theoretical discussion; it would be at least another 400 years before the church would be able to legislate rules about marriage.[24] Even the religious Placidia thought her marriage was a secular matter, so she did not worry about whether an Arian or Orthodox priest should preside, and, later in her life, she threatened her husband with divorce if she did not get her way. Marriage was no sacrament to her.

Athaulf, now the seeker of peace between Visigoths and Romans, sent word to his new brother-in-law Honorius that they were now one family. If he thought this would actually bring peace, he was sadly mistaken. Constantius was furious, since he had had designs on Placidia himself, and, as one source noted, he "nourished the hope that if he could defeat Athaulf he would marry Placidia."[25] It seems likely that Ravenna now revoked its permission for the Visigoths to settle in southern Gaul, and Constantius began to take measures against Athaulf's people. While he did not have the strength in his legions to attack the Visigoth's huge army, he did know their weakness: hunger.

Constantius set up his headquarters in Arles, where he could guard the passes back into Italy and control the port of Marseilles. Then he summoned his fleet, which was no longer needed for action in North Africa, and established a blockade of Narbonne. Now even all of Athaulf's treasure could not buy grain, and the land of southern Gaul had been plundered for years, so there was no more surplus. Furious, Athaulf first raised Attalus to the purple again, but that was only a token gesture. Attalus had no support in Italy any longer, and the only soldiers at his back were loyal to Athaulf. Even with the newly restored title of emperor (or usurper), Attalus could do nothing to feed the Visigoths. Athaulf had to move his people again, and he looked south to Spain.

Their forced departure angered many of the Visigoths who had settled in to towns and villas. Before they left, they plundered the towns they had previously occupied peacefully, burning Bordeaux and Bazas and bringing suffering in their wake. Fortified with as many goods and food as could be carried in their wagons, the Visigoths gathered to Athaulf in Narbonne and began to travel again. This time, Athaulf abandoned Attalus, leaving him to find his own way home.

Attalus tried to escape in a ship, but he was captured and taken to Constantius in Arles. He was delivered to Honorius in Ravenna and held until the emperor could use him in a humiliating public relations display. In 416, when Honorius made his first visit to Rome since the sack, he made Attalus walk before his chariot into the city in which he had served as prefect and acclaimed emperor. He was then dragged before the imperial throne, and two of his fingers were cut off, making him unable to hold a sword. After this insult, Attalus was sent into exile on the island of Lipara, off the north coast of Sicily. There is no way to know why Attalus was given such a mild sentence; traitors were usually killed quickly, but he escaped his adventures with the Visigoths relatively unscathed.

SPAIN AND BARCELONA

By the time Athaulf turned to Spain, the peninsula had already experienced years of barbarian invasions. In 406 and 407, Vandals, Alans, and Sueves had crossed the Pyrenees and terrorized the population, raiding, looting, and gathering food. The Spanish chronicler Hydatius was an eyewitness to the resulting devastation, and he wrote about it in apocalyptic terms. He described how disease accompanied the barbarians as they "ran wild through Spain," and famine, too, came upon the land as warfare prevented peaceful planting and well-armed barbarians demanded what food there was. Hydatius mourned the hunger that led to cannibalism, which went so far that mothers cooked and ate their own children. Finally, even the wild animals that lived in the woods and the hills grew bold, as

they were "habituated to feeding on the bodies of those slain by sword, famine, or pestilence," and attacked the living.[26]

Hydatius claimed that Spain had suffered additional woes because of Roman tax collectors who insisted on getting their money even after barbarians had devastated the land. The tax collectors were particularly vigilant because Spain was an important center for the usurpers, first Constantine III, then Gerontius, then Maximus. They had to support their armies and their courts from the lands they had, and Spain was the richest, so they had squeezed the residents mercilessly to fund their battles against Honorius and his court. Of course, this did not help the barbarians as they tried to live off the loot they captured.

As Athaulf discovered during his travels through Italy, a life of plundering could only last a limited time before the local land no longer could support the tribe and it had to move on. The barbarians in Spain came up with a solution; they decided to divide the land up among them and settle down; as Hydatius said, "the Lord turned them to peace."[27] This was easier said than done, and the chronicler's explanation of how they achieved it has led to much speculation on how it was actually accomplished.

Hydatius said they divided up the land "by lot," or more accurately, "by apportionment."[28] This gave the Sueves the northwest province of Galicia, the Alans received the provinces of Lusitania and Carthaginienses, and the rest of the Vandals got the southern province of Baetica. Looking at the map that shows these provinces, several facts become clear: First, the apportionment was not equal; the Alans did very well getting the center of the peninsula, with its great plains that could support their herds of horses. Second, the large province of Tarraconensis, nearest the Pyrenees, was left in the direct control of the emperor, which in 411 was the usurper Maximus. In the long run, the Sueves were fortunate to have Galicia. This mountainous, rainy province was largely inaccessible, protecting it for over a century until the Visigoths finally took over. The Vandals in the south ended up with the best location, though, because they not only gained from the rich trade from Africa but also learned about and acquired ships, which served them well in the forthcoming years.

The chronicler further says that the Spaniards who had survived the invasions "surrendered themselves to servitude under the barbarians who held sway throughout the provinces."[29] Orosius goes even further, claiming that once the barbarians decided to settle down, they became so friendly with the resident Romans that "now there may be found among them certain Romans who prefer poverty with freedom among the barbarians than paying tribute with anxiety among the Romans."[30] Orosius's account probably says more about the difficulties

Divisions of Spain, ca. 411
(Art by Katina Daanen)

of living among shifting imperial usurpers who needed high taxes to function than it does about benevolent barbarians. The ease with which Spain absorbed the incoming tribes is also due to the small numbers who invaded. There were probably only about 100,000 invaders among several million inhabitants,[31] so if they were peacefully distributed, they could be easily absorbed. But how exactly did they divide up the land? This question has troubled historians for decades.

It seems that the tribes did not make a treaty with Rome—either with Honorius or Maximus—but just informally agreed among themselves on a division. Some historians assume that they simply took some of the tax revenue of the provinces, diverting it to their use.[32] It seems most likely that there was no single plan among the tribes. If they were near cities, which made tax collection easier, they probably took some money; in other locations, they simply took over villas, living off the land that remained tilled by local peasants. In other instances, they may have farmed the land themselves. They all stayed away from Tarraconensis, the province directly ruled by the emperor. However it was achieved, peace settled

on the land for the next five years. It was during this lull that Athaulf and Placidia crossed the Pyrenees into Tarraconensis.

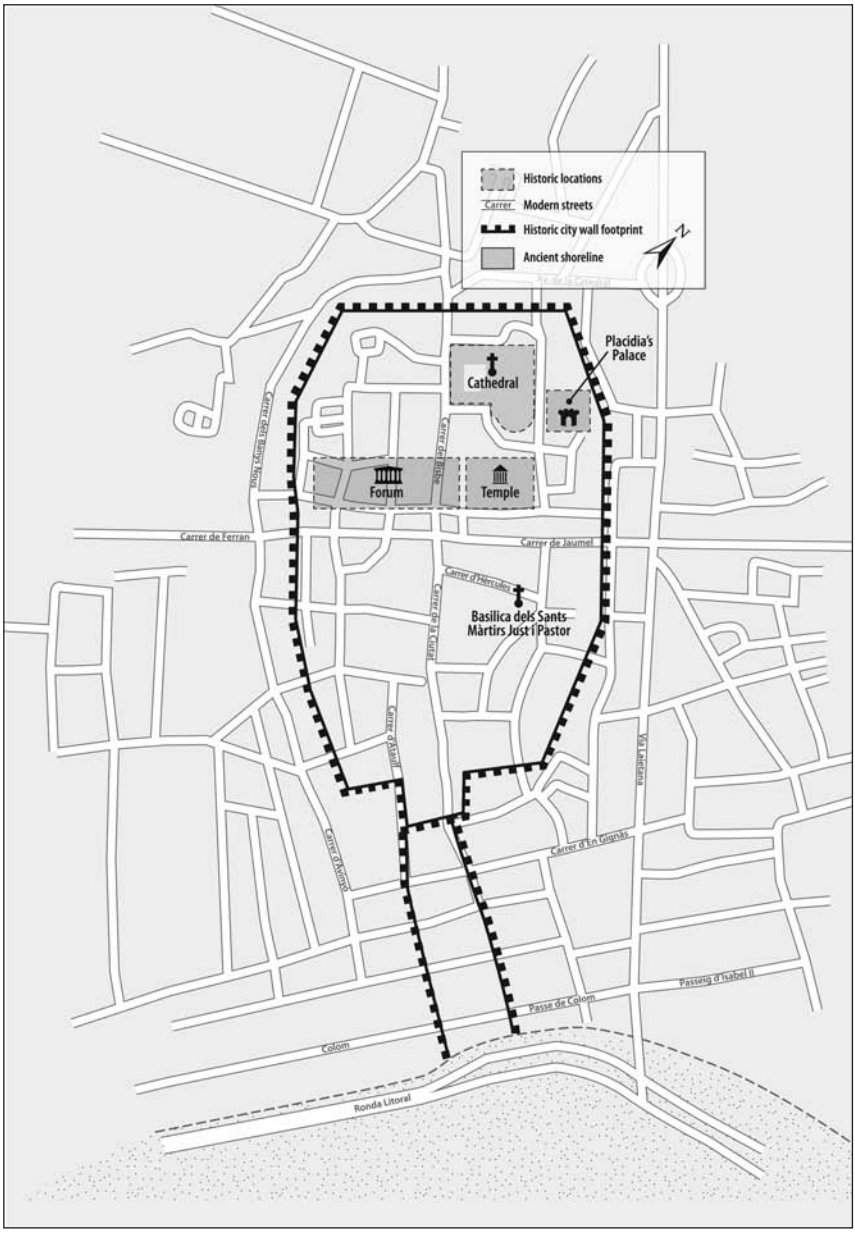
Sometime in the late winter of 414, the Visigoths moved through the Pyrenees. The long wagon trains once again lined up, gathered at Narbonne, and followed the Via Domitia south along the coast to the eastern edge of the Pyrenees. It is about 100 miles from Narbonne to the foothills of the eastern Pyrenees, so it would have taken the wagon train a week to ten days to travel this distance. Constantius was still in Arles with his legions and seemed willing to allow the Visigoths to go south without engaging them. They had only to worry about hunger, weather, and the high passes that characterize the Pyrenees range.

The Via Domitia leads to the most popular (and lowest) pass in the eastern Pyrenees, the *Col de Panissars*, now known as the *Col de Portus*. Hannibal probably came through this pass in 218 B.C., just as he had through the pass in the Alps, and the Roman road had been built in about 118 B.C. If Athaulf and his people arrived at the foothills in early February, this pass was accessible, because the major snow falls on the western part of the Pyrenees, leaving the eastern largely dry with bright sun. In February, the average temperature is 48 degrees Fahrenheit (9 degrees Celsius), and the snowline is above 1,400 meters. The height of the pass is about 1,200 meters, so they could count on the well-built stone road to be mostly clear as they climbed.

They probably started the climb early in the morning and followed the stone road upward. In February, they could count on almost eleven hours of daylight. Today, we can still see the tracks that carts cut into the road through this essential pass. At the top, near the modern village of Le Perthus, there were fortifications to prevent armies from coming through, but the pass was not guarded, so the Visigoths continued through unhindered. As difficult as this pass was, it had to seem easy after the Alps crossing.

At the top, they picked up the *Via Augusta*, the Roman road that connected Gaul with Spain. As they came down, they saw the low land before them, a small valley that extended to the Mediterranean. With the high peaks behind them and the sea to the east, they probably circled their wagons and rested before continuing onward. They had about seventy-three more miles to go through the valley near the coast to reach their goal of Barcelona, the Roman city of Barcino.

As they approached, the great walls of the city appeared. They were nine meters high and three and half meters thick. They stretched for 1,270 meters around the city and down to the port, which was the lifeline to grain that Athaulf was seeking. These were the walls that the usurper Maximus had fortified so extensively on the taxes he extorted from the residents of the province. Maximus,



City of Barcino (Barcelona)
(Art by Katina Daanen)

however, was not in the city to defend it. In 411, when Constantius had defeated Gerontius in Arles, Maximus had fled from Tarraconensis south to seek refuge with some of the barbarian tribes. Barcelona lacked a leader, and they happily opened the gates to Athaulf, husband of a daughter of the House of Theodosius.

Athaulf and Placidia took residence in the royal palace near the cathedral in the northwest corner of the city. The excavations in the City Museum in Barcelona today allow modern visitors to walk along the same roads that welcomed the couple as they walked from their palace past a laundry, wine shop, and other stores that marked a bustling, growing city. We may assume that others of his nobles joined him in the city while the rest of his people once again distributed their wagons in the nearby countryside.

Barcelona was a comfortable city. It was surrounded by small wooded hills on one side and warm waters and sandy beaches on the other. The climate is Mediterranean with mild winters and dry summers. The city was abundantly supplied with water from an aqueduct in the north that carried fresh water through the walls to fountains in the square. The attractive city was laid out in a grid, just like Roman military camps, with three streets going north and south and five going east and west. The royal palace faced the forum, which contained an old temple to Augustus that had been built in the first century B.C. This hexagon-style temple was faced with six magnificent columns, but, of course, from the time of Theodosius, it no longer served as a temple, just an architecturally interesting building. The center of religious life was the church on the northwestern wall of the city. This was originally a small chapel, but there is now a large, magnificent cathedral on the site, built over a crypt that holds the remnants of a Visigothic chapel.

When the Visigoths arrived in Barcelona sometime in February, the religious calendar—and the agricultural reality—called for scarcity. Food stored from the previous harvest was growing scarce, and Lent, the season of fasting before Easter, made a virtue of the reality of hunger. However, Barcelona took time out from the serious season of Lent on March 9 to celebrate the feast day of their revered bishop, Pacian, who had died in 391 and who was almost immediately recognized as a saint. Several of Pacian's writings are preserved, and he was noted as a great Father of the Church by Jerome. Although the Spanish church at the Council of Elvira in 309 had been the first to suggest that bishops, priests, and all clerics should be celibate,[33] Pacian had been married with a son, which shows how slowly clerical celibacy was enforced by the church and how political such appointments had been. Pacian's son served as chamberlain to Placidia's father Theodosius and as praetorian prefect to her brother Honorius. The connection

of Barcelona's famous bishop and the House of Theodosius contributed to the welcome Athaulf and Placidia received in the city.

Easter is a moveable feast, coming on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. In 414, Easter came on March 22, barely a month after Athaulf and Placidia arrived in Barcelona. The Easter festival began joyously at dawn with a church service and ended at a feast in which some recently born lambs were killed and cooked. It was time to celebrate, and the celebrations spilled out of the church into the forum of the city. Church festivals in fourth-century Spain (and probably elsewhere, though our information about Spain is most complete) were exuberant affairs; Bishop Pacian had complained about unseemly pagan-like festival celebrations, and he was right.[34] Like pre-Christian celebrations before them, these Christian festivals were marked by singing, dancing, drinking, and general merrymaking. Congregations gathered to dance, spinning in circles as part of their celebrations. As one observer explained, "prayer is nothing else but a dance hop" that strives toward heaven.[35] The music and dance were so prominent, that some church leaders complained that priests were chosen only for their musical ability or even for their skill at riotous dance.[36] Such complaints were repeated for centuries, so we can assume that music and dance remained a central component of religious celebration in Spain for a long time.

Just as hymns had become popular in Milan with Ambrose's compositions, Spain produced its own popular composer in Prudentius, a contemporary of Placidia who had written to attack Stilicho's pagan supporter Symmachus. Prudentius wrote a series of poem/songs celebrating the deeds of martyrs and saints, and these were incorporated into the celebrations on saints' days. In January in Barcelona, for example, the congregation sang Prudentius's hymns as they celebrated the feasts of the Spanish martyrs Fructuosus and Vincent of Tarragona and Valerius of Saragossa.[37]

Throughout 414, as the cycles of festivals occurred, there was peace in Spain and an accommodation between Hispano-Romans and barbarians, from Vandals to Visigoths. This temporary reprieve from violence influenced the Spanish theologian Orosius, who is a major source of information about the period. He corresponded with Augustine during the bishop's composition of *The City of God*, and Augustine asked him to expand on it and write his own refutation of the pagan critics of Christianity. The Spaniard wrote, "You bade me speak out in opposition to the empty perversity of those who [are] aliens to the City of God."[38] In his *Seven Books Against the Pagans*, Orosius offered a more down-to-earth analysis of the barbarian invasions than had Augustine. He saw the invasions as a positive corrective to the excesses of Roman rule.[39] He spoke as a good provincial

Spaniard seeing his land exploited by Roman tax collectors and soldiers and discovering that God was on the side of the invaders, who had been sent to redress these wrongs.

Where Augustine had been looking for cosmic meaning in the sack of Rome, Orosius's answer was simpler. He argued that God worked in mysterious ways and that sometimes bad things turn out to be blessings in disguise. It was this positive perspective that allowed him to say that Placidia's capture was a gift of God, and "by her marriage with this most powerful barbarian king, she was of great benefit to the state."[40] In that peaceful year in Barcelona, there must have been plenty of people who shared Orosius's hope for the fruits of this marriage.

Indeed, sometime during the early part of 414, Placidia became pregnant. The sources do not give a precise date of the birth, so it is impossible to calculate with certainty when she conceived, but it is possible to make a reasonable speculation. In traditional societies, before industrialization flattened out our connections to seasonal cycles, most babies were conceived in April and May.[41] This season was marked by increased food, festivals, and leisure, and it did not coincide with months of hard labor in the fields in the summer, nor with the winter season of death when the elderly usually died. While Athaulf and Placidia did not have the constraint of hard physical labor to interfere with their pursuit of an heir, nevertheless, we may perhaps take late April as a reasonable time for conception, and we can presume that the rest of the year passed with increasing joy and hope for an heir to seal the union of the peoples.

If the April conception date is accurate, then sometime in late January, Placidia went into labor. The physician Soranus, who wrote in the early second century A.D., composed a tract for midwives telling them how to help in a birth, so we have details of what Placidia likely experienced during the birth of her son.[42] As she came close to her time, she gathered some household women around her to help with the labor. As soon as it began, she sent for the local midwife, who was probably a well-trained slave or freedwoman, who charged a good fee for her services.

The midwife arrived with her equipment, including clean olive oil (not previously used in cooking), soft sea sponges, pieces of wool, linen bandages to swaddle the infant, and various fragrant herbs and fruits to use to revive the mother if she fainted. The household provided a hard bed for use during labor and a soft one for recovery after delivery, as well as braziers to keep the room warm in the dark days of January. The most important item, however, was the birthing stool, a chair used for the actual delivery. The chair had a sturdy back for the mother to lean against and arms for her to grasp. The seat was a crescent-shaped hole,

Figure 4.1. Midwife Sign, Ostia, Italy
(Photo: James L. Stanfield/National Geographic Creative)

open to the front and back so the midwife could assist in the birth. A midwife sign above a shop in Ostia, Italy, shows a woman in labor seated in the birthing stool (fig. 4.1).

At the onset of labor, Placidia lay on the hard bed attended by her women and the midwife. They eased her labor pains with a gentle massage with cloths soaked in warm olive oil. The midwife also massaged the cervix with an oiled finger to help ease its opening. When the time was right, Placidia was helped to the birthing stool, surrounded by her women, who were to ease her anxiety and confidently assure her that all was well. The midwife instructed her on correct breathing and pushing, until the infant, aided by gravity, was delivered. Soranus told midwives to wrap their hands in cloth or thin papyrus to keep the slippery infant from falling.

As soon as the baby was born, the midwife severed the umbilical cord with a sharp knife, then inspected the baby to be sure it was healthy. If the infant was deformed or even weak, midwives might choose to kill it. Placidia's son was perfect,

so the midwife would have tied off the cord with a woolen thread and placed a small piece of wool soaked with olive oil over the stump of the cord. She used her finger to cleanse mucus from the infant's mouth and nose, and she put a drop of olive oil in each eye. She then washed the boy with a mixture of salt, honey, and olive oil. The mildly astringent salt was to cleanse the remnants of the amniotic fluid, and the honey served as an antibiotic. The oil smoothed the infant's gentle skin, which could easily rash due to the rough salt. Meanwhile, the other women bathed Placidia and placed her in the soft bed to begin her recovery. After the infant was tightly swaddled in lengths of linen cloth, he was placed at Athaulf's feet to see if he was acceptable.

Athaulf lifted the child, accepting him as his son and heir, and he and Placidia joyously welcomed the infant. They all celebrated the passage of this dangerous time for women, for many died in childbirth. Athaulf probably richly rewarded the midwife who had successfully brought his son into the world.

Olympiodorus said Athaulf named the child Theodosius after Placidia's father, the great emperor. The chronicler was no doubt adhering to the convention that fathers named their sons and mothers remained in the shadows, but in this case Placidia very likely was influential in naming her boy. Just as she had influenced Athaulf in his decision to forge a new union between Rome and his Goths, giving the boy a Roman imperial name (instead of calling him Alaric, for example) signaled her desire to resume the imperial throne. By naming him Theodosius, the child's parents expressed the hope that he would someday rule in the West as Theodosius III, just as Placidia's nephew Theodosius II was ruling in the East. If they had hoped that the birth of a new heir in the Theodosian dynasty would reconcile Honorius—and the angry Constantius—to their marriage, they were wrong.[43] Nevertheless, they invested hope and care in this infant as the winter turned into spring.

The couple had little Theodosius baptized in the new large baptistery next to the basilica near their palace.[44] During the early centuries of Christianity, most baptisms were of adults, who had to choose consciously to become Christian and study to prepare themselves. By the fourth century, however, more and more parents were baptizing their infants.[45] The doors of the baptistery were locked during Lent while the faithful prepared for Easter, but on Easter Sunday, April 11, 415, the doors were flung open, and all the children were brought to the altar, the infant Theodosius predominant among them. The priest breathed upon the infants to exorcise any unclean spirits that inhabited them. Then they were anointed with oil and baptized with holy water. When Athaulf raised his newly baptized son to show the congregation, he asserted the boy's membership in the Christian com-

munity of Barcelona. This joyous Easter celebration had to have been the high point in Placidia's reign as queen of the Visigoths.

As a child of Rome, Theodosius had a traditional upbringing intended to make him strong, but some of these childrearing practices were harsh, and Roman infant mortality remained high. The tight swaddling clothes that enveloped him since birth kept him warm in the winter, but they were hot and constraining as the summer approached. Every day the infant was released for a cold bath, and the nurse would massage and mold his body, trying to make his skull round, his limbs straight, and his foreskin long. Only two out of every three infants survived their first year, and boys died in greater numbers than girls. Theodosius was not one of the survivors.

A DREAM DIES

As the brilliant spring in Barcelona moved into the dry, warmer summer, it brought the season of increased childhood deaths. A study of preindustrial villages in Italy, another region dominated by the Mediterranean climate, shows that there was a dramatic spike in deaths of children in the summer months.[46] The summer was the time when parents were busy and infants received less care. In summer, too, in those days before food refrigeration, intestinal infections swept through the populations, and infants were most susceptible to diarrhea and food-born illness. Finally, in the heat of the summer, cooks were not careful to heat up food, especially the mixture of grain and animal milk that supplemented breast milk in children's diets, and this also might cause gastrointestinal infections. Every June, pagan households offered sacrifices to the goddess Carna, who afforded protection against all illnesses of the belly, and Christians prayed to local saints for the same protection, but most of these prayers served no purpose as children succumbed and many died.

Theodosius died probably in late July or early August of 415. Athaulf and Placidia grieved deeply, following traditional Roman funeral rituals: Placidia closed the baby's eyes while family members and friends called out his name. Placidia and Athaulf arranged for him to be placed in a solid silver coffin for burial. Olympiodorus tells us that they buried him in a chapel outside of Barcelona, since in the early fifth century many places continued the Roman pattern of burying the dead outside the walls, instead of conforming to the growing Christian practice of placing the dead near the churches of the living.

Instead of going to the graveyard directly outside the walls of Barcelona, they may have buried the child at the chapel dedicated to the martyr Cucuphas. Increasingly, by the fifth century, Christians wanted to be buried near the graves

of martyrs, hoping to share the space that had been made holy by the burial. Cucuphas reputedly had been martyred in 304, during the great persecution of Diocletian, and had been buried where he had been imprisoned, at a Roman camp, Castrum Octavianum, about nine miles out of Barcelona northwest on the road toward Tarrasa. (The city now is Sant Cugat del Valles, named for Cucuphas, and there is a monastery on the site.) The Christians in Barcelona would have just celebrated the saint's day on July 25, singing a hymn composed by Prudentius for the occasion. It is probable that Placidia buried her child in this holy space, and current excavations at Sant Cugat indeed suggest that the baby Theodosius had been buried there.[47]

Along the way to the burial site, they went in a procession lighted by torches to dispel the pollution that accompanied the death of a child.[48] The sources do not tell us who delivered the funeral oration at the burial of their son. It was perhaps the local bishop of Barcelona, but his words were not preserved. Athaulf and Placidia returned to their palace, conducted a series of funeral meals, and grieved for their loss. Placidia never forgot this child; she would later exhume the body and bring the little coffin to Italy, where he could be close to her through eternity.

As deep as the couple's grief was, though, things were only to get worse. A few weeks after little Theodosius's death, Athaulf was engaged in his normal activity of tending his horses in the stable, accompanied by friends and servants. As usual, the men were armed since the Visigoths, like all the barbarians, went everywhere with their weapons. One of his servants was a man, perhaps named Dubius, who had previously served a chieftain that Athaulf had killed. Some writers have suggested that the chieftain was Sarus, Athaulf's long-time enemy. Dubius had been holding a grudge, even though Athaulf had taken him in, for it was thought to be cowardly to leave one's chief unavenged. Adding further insult to Dubius's pride, Athaulf had just made fun of the man's height. Dubius took this moment to take his vengeance; he drew his sword and stabbed Athaulf in the groin.[49]

Athaulf's guard rushed their king back to the palace and called on the best physicians to tend his wound. The texts do not say what happened to Dubius, but we might assume that he was immediately killed by Athaulf's guard. The stab must have missed a major artery, otherwise Athaulf would have bled out and died immediately, so his men may have hoped that this wound might heal as his previous one had. As good as ancient physicians were with battlefield wounds, however, there was one type that guaranteed death: perforation of the bowels. A Viking saga describes a healing woman who prepared leek broth for a wounded man; if she could smell leeks at the site of his abdominal wound, she knew he

would die from the punctured bowel.[50] Athaulf probably had just such a lethal wound in his lower abdomen.

On his deathbed, Athaulf's last thought was for the welfare of Placidia and his people. He told his brother (whose name was not mentioned) to return Placidia to Honorius and thereby secure Roman friendship.[51] Athaulf no doubt assumed that his brother would take over his kingship and protect his own family, but the king's death unleashed a power struggle among the Visigothic nobles that gave Placidia no time to mourn.

Word of Athaulf's death arrived in Constantinople on September 24, causing much rejoicing in the eastern capital. This is the only certain date offered by the chroniclers, and it is used to suggest the dates surrounding Athaulf's death. It took four to six weeks for news to travel from Spain to Constantinople, which makes the Visigothic king's assassination in August. He was said to have died a few weeks after his son, so that places Theodosius's death in late July or early August, which is consistent with expected infant mortality dates. Nevertheless, both dates must remain speculative.

This assassination was not an anomaly among the Visigoths. Throughout their reign in Spain and Gaul, there were many instances of regicide. In fact, bishops meeting periodically in Toledo through the fifth and sixth centuries repeatedly issued anathemas against anyone who assassinated the king, and at a subsequent council, they swore allegiance to a new king who had gained his throne by assassination and condemned anyone who might kill him.[52] The sixth-century chronicler Gregory of Tours characterized political assassination as the "Gothic disease," for when writing of the Spanish Visigoths, he said they "had formed the detestable habit of attacking with the sword any one of their kings who did not please them."[53] This long tradition began in Barcelona with the death of Athaulf.

In the confusion after Athaulf's death, Sarus's brother Sigeric became king, "more by force and intrigue than by lawful inheritance."[54] Had he conspired with Dubius before the assassination? There is no way to know, but he certainly took advantage of it and surrounded himself with Visigoths who had not fully supported Athaulf. Sigeric immediately took steps to ensure his succession. Athaulf's daughters by his first wife had fled to the Arian bishop Sigesarius, and the old man held them in his arms as Sigeric came into his presence. The new king ripped them from the bishop's arms and murdered them. It must only have been her royal blood that saved Placidia's life; Sigeric took her prisoner along with other Romans in Barcelona.

The assassin gave Athaulf the honor of a great funeral, but he took that cer-

emony as an opportunity to humiliate Placidia. He forced her and the other Roman captives to walk in front of his horse during the funeral procession, which traveled twelve miles from the city walls.[55] No one has identified Athaulf's grave, which is not surprising since the Goths had taken great measures to hide Alaric's tomb. However, it is plausible to think they went northwest toward the chapel of Saint Cucuphas where Theodosius had recently been buried. The chapel is just over nine miles from Barcelona over the foothills that loom behind the city. They may have even gone a mile or so beyond the chapel to the Roman town of Rubi to bury the king. Once he was buried, Sigeric led everyone back to Barcelona to begin his reign.

Seven days after Sigeric had taken power, he was murdered. The Visigoths elected a man named Wallia to be king. Wallia was a fierce warrior, and Orosius tells us he was elected specifically to break the peace with Rome and set the Visigoths again on a path of plunder and wandering. However, his anti-Roman bias did not extend to Placidia, whom he treated with "the highest honor and respect."[56] It may be that some of Wallia's support came from those Goths who had prospered under Athaulf and who showed continued respect for his widow. Nevertheless, fall and winter were approaching, and Constantius's blockade once more threatened the Visigoths with hunger. Wallia gathered the carts and led his people south, once again trying to cross to Africa, a land that promised unlimited grain.

They marched south to the ancient city of Gades (Cadiz) to prepare to cross the narrow Strait of Gibraltar. However, once again they were late for the shipping season, and a storm smashed some of the ships that Wallia had procured. The Visigoths remembered the destruction off Sicily when Alaric had tried to cross, and they gave up. Through the winter of 415–416, the Visigoths were driven to buy grain from their old enemies the Vandals, who sold it to them at hugely inflated prices and mocked their starvation.[57] Wallia remembered this insult and took his revenge later.

Wallia decided it was time to make peace with Honorius and to try to get the best deal that he could. Placidia continued to be a valuable commodity for the Visigoths because Constantius still wanted her as his bride, and Honorius desperately needed to keep his general Constantius happy. Constantius sent a representative named Euplutius to Wallia to make a deal, and they quickly came to a settlement. In exchange for releasing Placidia, Wallia received a huge quantity of grain, 600,000 measures, which would make about 12 million pounds of bread.[58] In addition, the Visigoths were made allies with Rome and authorized to march against the Vandals in Spain, taking their revenge with the emperor's permission.

Wallia led his formidable Visigothic army south into Spain and for two years

wreaked havoc among the Vandals and Alans. The remaining Vandals would in a few years look across the sea to Africa for a safer home. Honorius rewarded the Visigoths by settling them in southern Gaul as federates of the empire. Now, the Visigoths had a kingdom centered in Toulouse, where they held the lands Athaulf had been forced to abandon. This time, they did not just plunder the land but cultivated it, making it their home. Wallia did not live to enjoy the fruits of his negotiations, but the Visigoths remained a strong presence in southern France and Spain for the next three centuries.

Placidia was entrusted to Euplutius, who was to take her back to Ravenna, but she did not go alone. She was accompanied by a substantial guard of Visigoths who owed their allegiance to her. She may also have brought some of the treasure that had been her wedding gift from Athaulf, for it was rightfully hers under Roman law and Gothic tradition. She crossed the pass through the Pyrenees and arrived at Arles, where she probably met Constantius for the first time. At this time, the general likely proposed marriage to her, and she refused him. However, he was patient and sent her on to Italy. Along with her guard, her carts full of her possessions, and a Roman guard, she crossed back through the Pass of Montgenèvre and descended down into the Po Valley. Finally, Placidia entered the capital, probably arriving in the summer of 416. She was much changed from the sheltered girl who had come of age in Rome, and almost seven years had passed since she had seen her half-brother. She was now a widow with allies and money of her own, and she was an ex-queen who was used to making her own decisions. Ravenna, however, was a different setting from the Visigothic camp in which she had flourished.

CHAPTER 5

Wife and Mother in Ravenna

416–424

Ravenna became Placidia's home for most of the rest of her life. To approach Ravenna, she and her entourage crossed through the great pine forest that flanked the marshland in front of the city, then traveled along the wide road that served as a path through the marshes. As the smell of pine needles in the air gave way to the odors of the sea, they approached the wall that encircled both Ravenna and the important neighboring port of Classe. The ancient city of Ravenna looked very different from today's city. The Adriatic seashore has moved, leaving modern Ravenna further from the sea, and a great lagoon that once separated Ravenna from Classe has filled in. During Placidia's day, the city looked more like modern Venice, surrounded by rivers and canals and marked by the tides that swept seawater through the city twice a day.

The first-century Greek historian Strabo described the ancient city that had drawn Julius Caesar and Augustus because of its secure location. Strabo wrote that the whole city was built on piles, surrounded by canals. The city also was surrounded by rivers, on the north by a branch of the Po called the Padusa and on the south by a branch of the Po that Augustus had deepened for a canal. The whole area had been a delta-like marshland before Roman engineers drained and diverted the water into canals. Strabo claimed that the city had to be traversed by bridges or ferryboats. At high tide, the city "is washed by a considerable quantity of sea water, as well as by the river, and thus the sewage is carried off and the air purified. . . . It is a remarkable peculiarity of this place that, though situated in the midst of a marsh, the air is perfectly innocuous."[1]

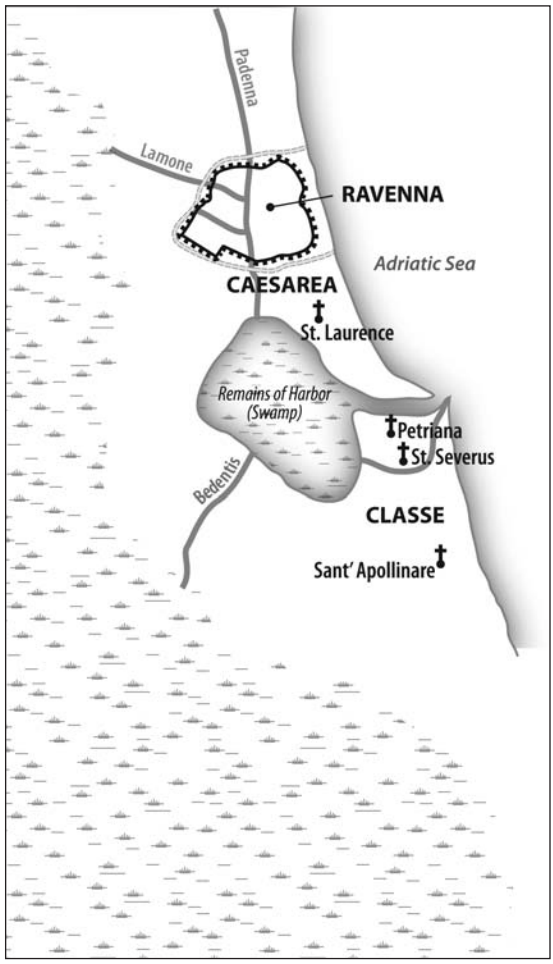
Strabo did not know about malaria-bearing mosquitoes, but he and others in the ancient world knew that marshes brought disease, just as the Goths discovered when many of them died while crossing the marshes south of Rome.

Strabo was right, however, that Ravenna's marshes did not seem to bring the same problems. Except in the winter months, the prevailing winds in Ravenna come from the sea in the east, and when the winds shifted to the west-northwest in the winter, the cooler weather impeded the disease-bearing mosquitoes. He was also right that seawater washing out the city's refuse twice a day was healthful. Ravenna's reputation as a health-preserving place had caused the Romans to establish a gladiator school there in order to keep their slaves healthy so they could fight and die bravely in the arenas of Italy.

Although the air was healthy, the salty marshes at first made fresh water hard to find. Travelers during Strabo's day complained that innkeepers gave them wine instead of water because it was cheaper. They even refused to water the wine when asked to. In the early second century, the emperor Trajan built an aqueduct into the city which resolved the water problems. The city was made up of three parts: Classe was the old port with its accompanying warehouses and barracks, which Augustus had built some two and a half miles to the east-southeast of Ravenna proper. Between Ravenna and Classe was a section called Caesarea, which served as an ancient cemetery in keeping with the old Roman practice of burying the dead outside the city walls.

While Ravenna had been a booming city during the second century, it had declined in population and prosperity through the fourth century. The gladiator school had closed with Honorius's banning of the sport, and a third-century plague had depleted the population. When Honorius made it his capital, the city was full of ruins, leaving a blank slate on which to create his new Christian city. Builders for the newly arrived court made good use of the remnants of older, ruined buildings. The city walls were repaired with old bricks, and new buildings, too, were built of these remnants, called *spolia*. The remnants included columns, capitals, pieces of marble, and other elements taken from imperial structures, and when the court arrived the availability of these materials allowed them to rebuild quickly.

An incident that took place as soon as Honorius arrived gives us a sense of the confusion that occurred during the rapid reclamation of this old, half-ruined city. Honorius reputedly ordered his chamberlain Lauricius to build him a palace and situate it outside the old walls of Ravenna in neighboring Caesarea. He gave him plenty of money to build it, but the pious man instead built a church dedicated to Saint Lawrence, a deacon of the Church of Rome who had been martyred in 258. Lawrence was a popular martyr who was particularly promoted by the Theodosian dynasty, so perhaps Lauricius believed he might avoid the emperor's wrath over the embezzlement of the funds designated for the palace. When Honorius



Ravenna and Classe, Fifth Century
(Art by Katina Daanen)

saw the church, he was furious and ordered Lauricius to be seized. At the moment his chamberlain was arrested, Honorius fell into a trance and saw a vision of the martyr Lawrence. Honorius forgave his builder and valued his counsel for the rest of his life. Augustine praised the beauty of this church in one of his sermons years later.[2]

The location of this early church was significant. Its placement in an old cemetery outside Ravenna's walls in the region of Caesarea claimed that burial space as Christian and holy, thus serving the same purpose as the basilicas outside the

walls of Rome, like those of Saints Peter and Paul built on old cemeteries. In addition, Lauricius's embezzlement forced Honorius to move the location of his proposed palace inside the walls, which he did, claiming the southeast corner of the city for his palace and administrative center.

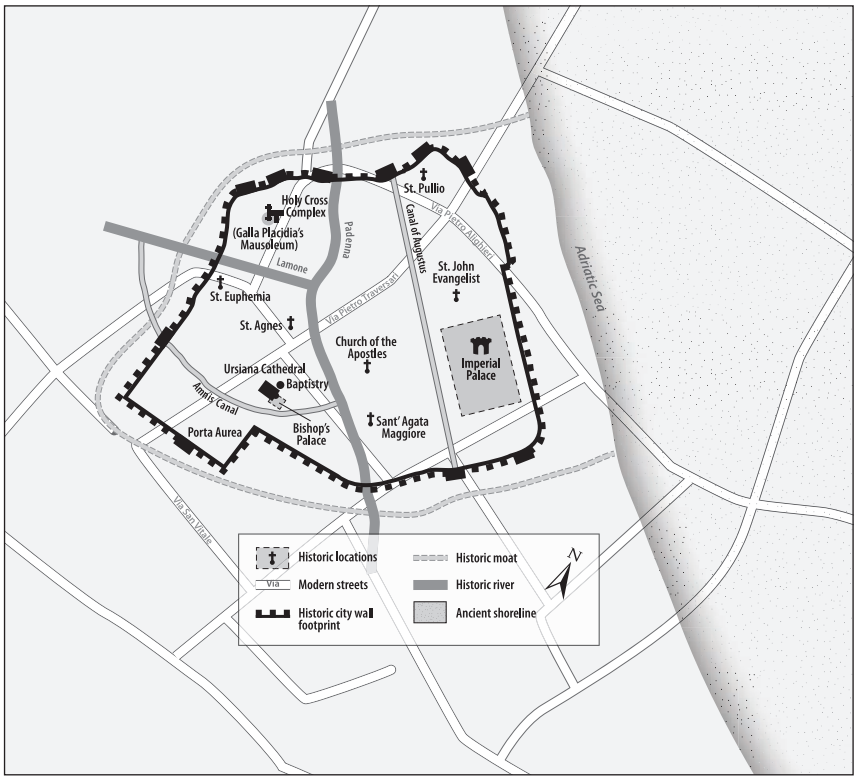
Placidia approached from the south and entered the *Porta Aurea*, the Golden Gate, which served as the ceremonial entrance to the city. The *Porta* was a double triumphal arch covered in marble and built in about A.D. 42 in honor of the emperor Claudius. The archways that shone in the southern sunlight had two triangular pediments supported by six carved Corinthian columns. The gate opened into the city, where the road probably led past a spacious forum with public buildings and ruins from the time of Augustus.[3]

After she entered the city, Placidia crossed the *Amnis* canal and immediately saw the new cathedral that had been begun by Bishop Ursus in 405, while she was still in Rome. Ursus, who "had a thin and beautiful face, and was moderately bald,"[4] had used the arrival of the court to build a great new church that came to be called the Ursiana Cathedral. He used old Roman brick and marble to build a basilica that was almost as long as Saint John Lateran church in Rome and Ambrose's cathedral in Milan. It had a semicircular apse on the east side and a central nave flanked by two aisles.[5] The pious princess may have stopped to look inside and see the precious stones that lined the walls and the glorious mosaic over the semicircular arch over the altar. The cathedral became a model for the kinds of churches she would later build.

Placidia turned east at the cathedral and followed a colonnaded street from the church to her brother's palace.[6] The palace probably covered the full southeastern part of the city, and texts suggest it was called "At the Laurel," perhaps named after a Laurel Palace in Constantinople. It must have been spacious to accommodate the emperor, his eunuchs, and all the courtiers who surrounded him. It also contained a large reception hall that led into an interior courtyard. Next to the palace was the imperial mint, founded in 402.[7] The mint struck gold and silver coins from 402 to 455 and beyond, including imperial coins featuring Honorius and Placidia.

In the fall of 416, Placidia moved into the palace and resumed her relationship with her brother. It must have been awkward, given what had gone on between them, and the situation would not have been eased by Placidia's Visigothic troops, who were stationed in nearby barracks and answerable to no one but her. There was no time for leisurely reestablishing their relationship because the emperor had big plans for the year 417.

Honorius must have decided that it was time to reward Constantius for his



Ravenna, 450
(Art by Katina Daanen)

successes. The emperor first appointed him as consul for the year 417, the two of them sharing the position. It had been customary for the emperors of the East and West each to designate one consul to share the honor for the year, but in 417 (presumably with the eastern emperor Theodosius II's approval), the western portion designated both consuls.[8] As a further reward, sometime in the fall of 416, Honorius promised Constantius that he could marry Placidia.

On January 1, 417, the first day of their joint consulship, Honorius decided it was time for the marriage to take place. Placidia strongly objected and argued with her brother, which made Constantius "very angry" with her and her whole entourage, perhaps including her Visigoths who supported her objections. Honorius, who was placed in a difficult situation, broke the deadlock. He simply took her hand, in spite of her protests, and placed it in the hands of Constantius, making the marriage legal. Later, a more formal ceremony was concluded with "great magnificence."[9]

There were any number of reasons for Placidia to reject Constantius's suit, and scholars have speculated as to her motives.[10] She may simply have objected to her brother using her for political purposes in the same way she had objected to becoming the wife of Stilicho's son. She may have wanted to remain single, devoting her life to religious pursuits, though her continued desire for political power makes this possibility less plausible. Finally, she may just have disliked Constantius. He was almost twice her age, ugly, and not from a noble family. Theoretically, her refusal should have ended the subject because under Roman law women could not be forced into marriage. However, Honorius was the emperor, and he had promised her to Constantius. As she had done all her life, Placidia figured out how to make the best of it.

She became pregnant within a few months of the wedding, and in late 417 or early 418, the midwife brought her oils and birthing chair to the palace. Placidia delivered a healthy girl. Once again, as she had done with her son by Athaulf, Placidia seems to have chosen the name. The girl was named Justa Grata Honoria. Justa and Grata were the names of her two maternal aunts, of whom Placidia had become fond in her orphaned youth. Both names recalled the imperial lines from which she was descended. The name Honoria, by which the child was customarily known, was in honor of the reigning emperor. There was no recognition here that Constantius was the father.

As was the custom with noble Roman women, Placidia arranged for a slave to breastfeed the baby. The Greek physician Soranus wrote in the first century about the qualifications for such a wet nurse. The best was a mature woman who has already had several children, proving the quality of her milk. She also was to have a good nature, since it was believed that emotions, such as anger and fear, were transmitted through the milk.[11] Certainly, the palace could have its pick of nurses. By having someone else nurse her infant, Placidia ovulated again quickly, and in the fall of 418, she became pregnant again.

On July 2, 419, Placidia bore a son. She named him Flavius Placidus Valentinianus. Flavius was Constantius's first name, but that was not particularly significant since Flavius was one of the most common names of the late empire.[12] Placidus, of course, was given in honor of his mother, and Valentinian, the name by which he was known, was after Placidia's maternal uncle and grandfather, both emperors. Just as she had named her first son, Theodosius, an imperial name, signaling that she expected him to rule, this second son was given the name of emperors. He, too, was meant to grow up to reign. Placidia worked hard to make sure her imperial hopes would come to fruition. In Roman tradition, the infant was placed at his father's feet for his approval, and when Constantius raised the

child, he also expected a descendant of his to rule; his desire for upward-mobility had succeeded in a stunning way.

On Easter after each child's birth, Constantius and Placidia brought the infant to the magnificent baptistery next to the cathedral. The baptistery was an octagonal building similar to the one Bishop Ambrose built in Milan in the 370s. Ambrose had identified the number eight as significant and appropriate to baptism because the Resurrection of Christ had occurred on the eighth day. Bishop Ursus opened the doors and presided over the baptism of these important children along with other infants and still some adults. The font was of marble and large enough for adults to be immersed. Just as in the ceremony at Barcelona for the infant Theodosius, Honoria and Valentinian were blessed and immersed in the font. Then they were anointed with oil and received by their parents in celebration of their membership in the church. In about 450, Bishop Neon redecorated this baptistery, replacing its wooden dome with one of stone decorated with glittering mosaics. (We can visit this baptistery today.)

Placidia had no more children. It may be that, having fulfilled Constantius's (and her) desire for an heir to the western throne, she told him that she would lead a celibate life from then on. This had been the arrangement her contemporary Melania the Younger had made in Rome while Placidia lived there. Melania's husband agreed that the holy woman could live chastely after they had produced two children "to inherit our possessions."[13] Melania's renunciation had been public and much praised in Rome and may well have provided a model for Placidia. She disliked her husband enough that she probably would have been happy to leave him to his slaves and concubines.

At this point, Placidia settled into the palace in Ravenna and involved herself in the political and religious controversies of the day. In the sources, a picture emerges of a well-rounded, intensely human figure, with strengths and flaws. She was both pious and practical, religious and ruthless. Moreso than her brother, who simply leaned on the strength of a general while he enjoyed palace life, she was like her father, a true representative of the House of Theodosius.

As Placidia took up her role in Ravenna, she based her actions on various models of Christian rulers in addition to her father, a task made particularly challenging by the fact that she was a woman. She drew from the example of Constantine's mother, Helena, who built churches claiming space for God, and she imagined herself as one of the empresses of the House of Theodosius, who depicted themselves in imperial regalia on their coins (see fig. 1.2). Like her father and Constantine before him, she involved herself actively in theological controversies, seeing the role of empress as being a leader of the church. Placidia also

drew from the example of powerful nonroyal women, like Melania in Rome, who set up Christian households of prayer, study, and piety. Finally, as a traditional Roman matron, she had expectations of herself as a wealthy patron using her money to improve the community through projects like the columns she commissioned in the port of Ostia and her many buildings. Throughout her life, she drew from these examples as she, in turn, created a new model of a Christian ruler and of a woman in charge.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AND CONTROVERSIES

Contemporaries described Placidia's religious observances, one claiming that "she showed equal zeal in religious observances and care for the churches."[14] The evidence supports this description. As soon as she arrived in Ravenna, there was a stirring of religious involvement in the court, and much of it can be directly attributed to Placidia's influence, as neither Honorius nor Constantius had shown much interest before. After all, Bishop Ursus had been instrumental in building the cathedral, and it had taken a miracle for Honorius to allow the church of Saint Lawrence to stand.

In 417, she commissioned a church in the northwest section of the city.[15] This structure had a cross-ground plan unlike the other basilicas built in Ravenna but similar to Ambrose's Church of the Apostles in Milan and to Constantine's Church of the Apostles in Constantinople. While similar in shape, Placidia's church was dedicated to the Holy Cross (Santa Croce), perhaps in recollection of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem church in Rome that had been founded by Constantine's mother, Helena, in which she covered the floor with the actual dirt from the holy city. Placidia had commissioned a mural in the Holy Cross Church in Rome (now lost), and she hoped to associate herself with the famous Helena. It may also be that she had acquired, or was hoping to acquire, a relic of the True Cross to honor Ravenna.[16] Whatever her motive, she spared no expense in its construction.

The church, like so many others in Ravenna, was built of old brick, but the architects were brought from Constantinople, and they incorporated surprisingly new techniques into the building. A striking example is the dome, held up by triangular-shaped pieces of stone on the corners that allow for a smooth transition between the square walls and the round dome. These triangles are called *pendentives* and make the dome seem to float miraculously. Earlier surviving Christian buildings used different techniques to raise the dome, either employing a barrel structure or simply resting the dome on the square walls and filling in the corners. The innovation in Placidia's church probably influenced the greatest domed

church—the Hagia Sophia, built a century later in Constantinople—which traditionally gets the credit for developing pendentives.[17]

Placidia also outdid herself decorating the interior of the church. She brought master artists to cover the walls with stunningly detailed mosaics that are bathed in subtle light from windows made of alabaster. The floor was paved with large panels of black, white, and polychrome marble, and even roundels of purple marble (porphyry) were imported from Egypt and placed on the floor.

Agnellus of Ravenna, writing in the eighth century, relates a story about Placidia's piety. People said she went to the church at night and ordered candles to be placed on the circles of porphyry by the main door. She then threw herself down on the pavement and passed the night "pouring out prayers to God" and "praying in tears."[18] What did she pray for in those years after the church was built? She likely prayed for the survival of her children, the prosperity of the House of Theodosius, and her own welfare. Perhaps, like Melania, she prayed to be released from intercourse to free herself for a more holy life. In these early centuries of Christianity, it was also not uncommon to pray for ill to befall one's enemies. Did she pray for Constantius's death? Her prayers in this beautiful church went unrecorded.

Most of the church is gone now, and we are largely left with medieval descriptions that give us an idea of its beauty, scale, and decoration.[19] However, a small section of the church (fig. 5.1), a chapel that was attached to the southern end of the narthex, has survived and is a sample of the artistic magnificence of the whole. It is currently known as the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, though it was probably never intended as a mausoleum and she is not buried there.[20] The small space is covered with mosaics in bright colors and lavish gold that overwhelm the viewer with otherworldly visions of gardens, nature, martyrs, and Christ as the Good Shepherd, all woven together with abstract borders. The dome overhead, floating on its pendentives, shows a magnificent night sky with 567 gold eight-pointed stars that swirl in concentric circles around a cross of gold surrounded by the four figures of the evangelists. The twentieth-century composer Cole Porter purportedly was inspired by this vision of the night sky when he wrote his famous song "Night and Day."

The meaning of the images in the chapel have spurred much scholarly debate, but here I only discuss the implication of one, that of Christ as the Good Shepherd (fig. 5.2). In the early Christian period, the most popular image of Christ showed him as a poor shepherd carrying a sheep. Here, on the other hand, is Christ as a wealthy Roman, cloaked in imperial purple and gently presiding over a peaceful flock. This was the image of Christ that appealed to the imperial fam-

Figure 5.1. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy. Interior. Originally part of Placidia's Church of Santa Croce. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

ily—Christ as emperor leading the faithful. This is the image that inspired emperors to lead the church, whether it was Constantine calling a church council, Theodosius choosing orthodoxy over Arianism, or Placidia involving herself in the great Christian debates of the day.

In 417, when Placidia arrived in Ravenna, she discovered that church leaders

Figure 5.2. Good Shepherd Mosaic in Mausoleum of Galla Placidia
(Photo: Album/Art Resource, NY)

were engaging in a dispute over the nature of humanity, sin, and salvation. This dispute, which had a profound influence on the future of Christianity, went back to 410, when the Gothic invasion sent refugees to North Africa. Along with the intellectual pagans who caused Augustine to embark on his monumental work *The City of God*, a British monk named Pelagius also arrived in Carthage, having fled Rome. In time, his ideas became known as the heresy of Pelagianism, and the threat they posed launched Augustine on his final theological battle, one that involved the court in Ravenna.

In its simplest terms, the argument was about free will: Did people have complete freedom to choose not to sin? Pelagius said yes. He was a monk who admired the rigorous piety of people like Melania and the other ascetic women and men in Rome who had chosen a holy life, and he gave them full credit for their accomplishment. Of course, if people *could* choose to be good and holy, that meant they *must* do so or God would hold them accountable. Pelagius had many followers in North Africa and Italy, and in the first years after the sack of Rome in 410 he spread his ideas there. Then he moved on to the Holy Land, following many of the ascetics he so admired. For years, Augustine ignored Pelagius and his ideas;

he was busy writing *The City of God,* believing that paganism was the biggest threat to the Christian Communities. However, by 416, as Placidia was returning to Ravenna, Augustine engaged in the argument for the soul of humanity: Are we free not to sin or are we fatally flawed at birth, bound to sin?

In 416, church leaders gathered at the North African city of Milevis for a council to discuss Pelagius's ideas. Even Orosius, who had chronicled the barbarian invasions, came from Spain to attend, and he joined the aging Augustine to listen to the arguments on both sides. The bishops listened, then condemned the belief of perfect free will that Pelagians advocated. Augustine and several other North African bishops quickly wrote a long letter to Pope Innocent in Rome, explaining the controversy and asking for his support in eliminating these newly condemned ideas from the Christian congregations in Rome.[21] Pope Innocent agreed with the African bishops and condemned Pelagius and his main disciple in Rome, the popular Caelestius. Innocent died shortly thereafter, and his successor Zosimus also excommunicated Pelagius and his followers.

Ravenna, too, weighed in on the controversy. In April of 418 a law was issued in the names of the joint emperors—Honorius and the eastern emperor Theodosius II—that ordered Pelagius and Caelestius expelled from the city and all their followers exiled and their property confiscated.[22] This edict came from the West and was signed by both emperors. (All the laws were formulated in that way.) There is no way to prove that Placidia was involved in this edict, but we do know that she was intimately involved in other matters of religious legislation, so it is likely that she exerted her influence in this growing Pelagian controversy. The palace followed up on this legislation with a letter in June 419 to the African bishops, Aurelius and Augustine, reinforcing the previous decree and urging the Africans to root out these "vile arguments" and banish the heretics.[23]

The argument raged for years. As late as 421, Augustine wrote a long tract against an articulate follower of Pelagius, Julian of Eclanum, a bishop in southern Italy who was highly respected because he had sold his own property to feed the hungry during the years of the Gothic looting. The theology of the controversy is complex. Pelagians argued for a beautiful vision of humanity in which babies were born innocent in the image of God and were free to shape themselves into holy vessels as they grew. The notion that an "original sin" made people incapable of not sinning seemed absurd to Julian.[24] Augustine, by contrast, saw infants as burdened from birth with original sin, a stain that needed to be cleansed by God's grace and baptism to gain the hope of salvation.

In fact, as Augustine developed his argument against Julian he established a view of sexuality that some Romans (and many modern thinkers) found extreme

and distasteful. Augustine explained that Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience and lustful intercourse brought about a bodily disobedience. From the moment of original sin, men could not control their erections and women could not control their wombs to bear children painlessly. The result of this bodily disobedience was lust, and original sin was transmitted by a man's semen in an act of lustful intercourse. Augustine argued that without that first disobedience, intercourse in paradise would have been without lust, without erections; the man's will, instead of his lust, would have controlled his penis. Julian mocked this position, calling it "soft and effeminate."[25] Augustine insisted, seeing in lustful intercourse the mechanism that weighed down every infant with sin.

One popular result of Augustine's theology was the rise of infant baptism. Just as Placidia had baptized the infant Theodosius, taking comfort in the grace that the sacrament had bestowed on the infant, mothers and fathers throughout Christendom had begun baptizing infants, hoping that even if the rite did not keep them safe, it would at least ensure that they would be held in God's hands if they died. In a sermon, Augustine played into these feelings when he told of a child who had died unbaptized. His mother, in despair at his eternal damnation, took him to the shrine of Saint Stephen. There he was raised from the dead in order to be baptized before he died again, this time in the certainty of receiving eternal life.[26] Pelagians could offer nothing so concrete; they could merely say that the child was innocent at death. For Pelagians, baptism should come during adulthood as one of many choices individuals made to lead them to God and a holy life. Thus, while the idea of original sin contributed to infant baptism, the reverse was equally true. The popularity of infant baptism led to the acceptance of the idea of original sin.

By the middle of the fifth century, Augustine's view of humanity and its burden of original sin was entrenched into church law and supported by imperial edict from Ravenna. This view, with its accompanying attitudes toward lust and the human body, found its way into modern western civilization in ways whose origins we can hardly remember. Due to the prevalence of this position, by the sixth century infant baptism was the norm, and priests baptized children at all times of the year instead of waiting for Easter and the presence of a bishop.

While religious arguments raged, even the heavens seemed to echo and forecast religious turmoil. On July 19, 418, there was a solar eclipse that darkened the Italian sky. Olympiodorus wrote that the "sun was eclipsed so completely that the stars shone." The eclipse was followed by a great drought, and an unusually shaped comet streaked across the sky.[27] As usual, people claimed that the eclipse forecasted disaster, but of course people couldn't be sure what the sign meant.

Soon enough, however, even more problems split the church, for in December 418 Pope Zosimus died, and Rome was rocked by a disputed papal election.

Zosimus had been a controversial pope. He had entered the Pelagian debate on the side of Pelagius, then he had changed his position. In his correspondence, he wrote that his opponents brought accusations against him to Honorius.[28] Therefore, it is not surprising that, at his death, factions emerged that prevented a smooth transition to the next pope. On Friday, December 27, as the funeral of Zosimus was taking place at Saint Peter's Basilica, partisans of the archdeacon Eulalius at the Lateran basilica elected him pope. That the election took place at Saint John Lateran church in the center of Rome shows that Saint Peter's remained a place to venerate the dead rather than to serve the living church. There was no Sistine Chapel then where papal elections were held. The crowds outside the Lateran basilica, where they had gathered in anticipation of the election, acclaimed Eulalius pope. The new pope and his supporters then waited at the Lateran basilica until December 29 for the formal consecration, which customarily took place on a Sunday. Meanwhile, on Saturday, another election took place in a different church. There, priests gathered and elected Boniface, an advisor to Pope Innocent, Zosimus's predecessor. Both men were consecrated on Sunday in different churches.[29] The lines were drawn, and the trouble grew.

As rioters took to the streets of Rome, the prefect of the city, a pagan named Symmachus, who had only been in office a few days, felt ill equipped to deal with this quarrel between Christians. He sent a message to Ravenna asking for advice, and a sixth-century historian claims that the message came to Placidia. "On hearing this the empress Placidia . . . reported the matter to the emperor Honorius."[30] She did more than report, however. The surviving correspondence on this matter shows that she remained heavily involved; two letters written by Placidia herself give us a glimpse of her involvement in religious and political affairs that extended beyond this incident.

Honorius and the court (including his sister) recognized Eulalius as rightful pope since he had been elected first. Boniface's supporters, however, petitioned the emperor, saying that the election was irregular and accusing Symmachus of sending incorrect information. Honorius called both parties to Ravenna along with other Italian bishops. He would hear the case on February 8, along with a small number of churchmen. This meeting in Ravenna failed to resolve the issue; Honorius needed a larger body, and he summoned a synod to meet at Spoleto on June 13. Meanwhile, he told Boniface and Eulalius to stay out of Rome until a decision was made, and he commanded the bishop of Spoleto to go to Rome to celebrate the important feast of Easter.

Placidia wrote two letters to African bishops inviting them to attend the Spoleto meeting to resolve the disputed election. The first was addressed to Aurelius of Carthage, the senior bishop, and the second was sent to seven other bishops, including Augustine. Placidia summarized her view of the problem, declaring that "unbridled ambition had ushered a battle over the papacy wholly incommensurate with the holy mode of life of such an office, and that a small gathering of bishops had been unable to come to a decision." Therefore, the court needed the question to be settled by an assembly of bishops so prestigious that no one would question the decision.[31]

It is in the parenthetical language of the letters that we can gain some insights into Placidia's view of herself at court. In both letters, she refers to the emperor as her "blood brother," reminding the world that the blood of Theodosius ran through her veins and that this alone gave her authority. She never mentions her husband nor her infant children. She does not remind them that she is mother of an heir, nor wife of the commander of all Rome's forces. Furthermore, she acknowledges that her brother's summons should have been sufficient, yet she adds her own plea, perhaps implying that she has been involved in theological issues, like her father and unlike the hitherto nonchalant Honorius. As she wrote, "Although the sacred authority of the emperor, my blood brother, . . . ought not to be neglected, we deem it vital to add letters of our own serenity."[32] We can also glimpse Placidia's deep religious fervor in these letters, for she asks Aurelius to come to Italy not only to offer his opinion on the case but also that she might receive "your benediction that we so desire."[33] She was indeed her father's daughter, wielding power while seeking the blessings of the church.

Placidia wrote another letter about the disputed papal election that further reveals her political and religious awareness. She composed a letter to Paulinus of Nola, bishop of a town in southern Italy, inviting him to attend the proposed council in Spoleto. Paulinus was an interesting choice for an attendee because, although he had been bishop of Nola since 408, his reputation was that of an ascetic holy man. He was a wealthy man with properties in Spain and Gaul and had married a relative of the famous Roman ascetic Melania. He converted to Christianity and was drawn to the ascetic life, withdrawing from his properties and turning down an offer to become bishop of Barcelona in order to live a quiet life of contemplation in Nola, where he venerated the local martyr, Felix. Paulinus is known for his correspondence with Augustine, Jerome, and many of the great fourth-century church fathers, so his voice would have carried much weight at the council. Certainly, the ruling of this venerable holy man would have cooled the anger of the squabbling.

Placidia might even have met the bishop in 410 when Alaric sacked the city of Nola as the Goths, with Placidia captive, moved south from Rome. She certainly would have heard of his reputation for sanctity when she lived in Barcelona. Placidia's letter is filled with fondness, as she writes that no one else is so respected as Paulinus, "who is especially esteemed as a disciple of the apostle himself." Showing respect for his comfort (and age), she assures him that the trip to Spoleto is not arduous and the "air is soothingly balmy."[34]

However, events in Rome did not wait for the council to meet in Spoleto in the summer. Easter fell on March 30, 419, but on March 18 Eulalius entered Rome in violation of Honorius's decree. The prefect Symmachus quickly wrote to Constantius, asking him how to respond to Eulalius's defiance of imperial order, and, not surprisingly, Constantius responded that Eulalius had to be made to obey. As rioting continued in the streets of Rome, Eulalius occupied the Lateran Church, no doubt believing that if he could hold the building he could keep the title. Symmachus ran out of patience, and he sent his forces into the church and arrested Eulalius. The Bishop of Spoleto duly celebrated Easter in the Lateran Basilica in accordance with Honorius's command.

At this point, the court lost patience with Eulalius's disobedience. As she had shown in her dealings with Athaulf, Placidia had the greatest respect for the law, and Eulalius had broken it. Honorius and Constantius, too, believed that Eulalius's actions had made him unsuitable to be pope. They cancelled the gathering in Spoleto for June and, on April 3, 419, recognized Boniface as Pope. Honorius issued a law stating that, in the future, if there was a contested papal election, both parties must step down and a new election must be held.[35] With this resolution, peace descended again on Rome and its church, and Boniface remained pope until his death in 422, earning a reputation for his vigorous opposition to Pelagius's followers.

Around this time, chroniclers reported disasters that they attributed to the disruptions in the church. In 419, earthquakes more violent than usual struck the Mediterranean basin, causing many deaths, and a blazing star fell from the sky and landed in the sea. One chronicler claimed that pagans foolishly thought these events happened in "accordance with nature," but he reassured the readers that in fact they were a "punishment sent on men by divine anger."[36] As Christians saw a cause-and-effect relationship between religious imperfection and natural disasters, these events reinforced what the House of Theodosius believed. It was up to emperors to quell natural disasters by assuring order on earth.

Placidia's involvement with the disputed papal election (and the Pelagian controversy) shows that, like her father before her, she believed it was her right, as well

as her obligation, to be involved in religious matters, whether administrative or substantive. She established this involvement as soon as she arrived in Ravenna and continued it throughout her life. Also like Theodosius, she helped reinvigorate the battle against paganism in the empire, and throughout her life, Placidia was a ruthless advocate for Christianity, willingly stripping dissenters of their property and their lives. However, during these early years in Ravenna, Placidia functioned as a married woman in the shadow of her brother.

MARRIED LIFE IN RAVENNA

With his marriage to Placidia, Constantius got what he wanted—a beautiful, royal, "most noble" princess, two children, and an indispensable role at the palace. He also learned to be careful what he wished for. Married life turned out to be less than perfect for Constantius. His first problem was money. He was a soldier who had come up through the ranks; he was not rich in an age that required it of public officials. His first money had come when he was victorious over the African usurper Heraclian in 414. Constantius asked Honorius to give him Heraclian's estate, and the grateful emperor complied. Olympiodorus said that there was less gold than they expected at the African's estate, some two thousand pounds of it. While this sounds like a substantial sum, it was just adequate to cover Constantius's expenses for his first consular year in 414.[37]

The consul's position was largely an honorary one, bringing prestige to the holder of the office and alerting the Roman people of his importance. In return for such public acclamation, consuls had to spend lavishly. One of their main expenses in the fifth century was to pay for the chariot races that had fully replaced the gladiatorial games that had once been so popular. Races were presented about sixty-six days a year, so they were expensive. A race day began with a lavish procession including musicians and dancers. Then there might be as many as twenty-four races, in which charioteers tried to force their opponents to crash, leading to injury and death. If the races were not lavishly presented, the consul lost more prestige than he had gained by his appointment. Spending so much was no problem when emperors held the consular position, but it was a large burden on the general. Constantius's two thousand pounds of gold slipped away quickly. He was left with Heraclian's lands, which were only valued at another two thousand pounds and did not bring in much income.[38]

Once Constantius married Placidia, his expenses only grew. She was rich in her own right, with estates in various parts of the empire that brought in substantial money, and she likely brought treasure with her from the Visigoths. But all that wealth remained hers; Constantius could not take it from her. Living in the

court required many expenses. Both Placidia, who spent freely, and Constantius had to pay their personal guards—she kept her Visigoths who were loyal only to her, and Constantius had his own guard. Furthermore, court life required lavish expenditures on clothing, entertainment, and endless bribes, even to the eunuchs who moved powerfully behind the scenes.

Constantius extorted money from Romans in various questionable dealings, and he was too powerful for them to complain, at least until after his death. His obituary gives the clearest account of his financial problems. The author wrote, "He deserved praise both for his other virtues and because—until his marriage with Placidia—he was superior to bribes (or avarice). However, after he married her he became greedy for money. After his death, petitions flooded into Ravenna from all sides from victims of his financial exactions."[39] This account blames Placidia for his greed, and, in the most general sense, that was true. If you married the sister of the emperor, you had to maintain a certain standard of living. The petitions for redress that flooded into Ravenna after Constantius's death were not satisfied. The chronicler blamed "Honorius's lethargy and Placidia's close kinship" for the failure of fiscal justice.[40]

In spite of his money problems, Constantius's power continued to grow and, with it, Placidia's increasing stature. In 420 he held the consulship for the third time, which was very rare for a nonemperor, and his colleague was the eastern emperor Theodosius II. This appointment signaled that Constantius's status was on the rise, and in the next year, on February 8, 421, Honorius gave him the rank of Augustus and shared with him the throne of the West. The chronicler who recounted this appointment credited Placidia, saying, "To honor his connection by marriage," Honorius raised Constantius to the purple,[41] reaffirming that it was his connection to the royal bloodline that made emperors, not any military achievement.

Shortly after Constantius's elevation, Honorius and Constantius awarded Placidia the title Augusta (empress). At the same time, she set her son Valentinian on the road to the throne by ensuring that he was proclaimed "Most Noble" (*nobilissimus*), the title she had held for so long, but the promotions did not go through smoothly. It was customary for the emperor to send the images for the newly acclaimed to his colleague in the east, who would then post them signaling his acceptance. However, Theodosius II rejected the promotions.

Neither of Honorius's wives had been given the title of Augusta, so perhaps Theodosius did not want to elevate the emperor's sister, particularly since that implied a succession. However, in the east, a number of the Theodosian wives had received the title of empress, including Placidia's father's first wife. In fact, it

was almost assumed that the eastern women of the Theodosian dynasty would receive the title Augusta. As Placidia had watched the coins struck with the images of these women on them, she, too, must have assumed that title was her right. It was years before her title was accepted in the east, but in 421 she must have felt satisfied with her rise in status.

The new empress may have enjoyed her title, but Constantius did not. Within a few months, he said that he regretted taking the imperial rank. The old soldier was no longer free to go off wherever and whenever he chose. He was also not allowed to "enjoy the recreations he had been accustomed to enjoy."[42] The imperial court was surrounded by so much ritual that his old companions, with whom he liked to drink and joke, now had to prostrate themselves on the floor and stay silent until they were asked to speak. Even his clothing no longer offered the ease of the military tunic; the heavily embroidered and jeweled robes of the emperor weighed him down as much as the obligations of imperial rituals.[43]

Placidia, on the other hand, was born to the imperial rituals, and she exerted her power in a curious incident that took place in 421. An Asian magician named Libanius came to Ravenna. Libanius claimed to have the power to defeat barbarians without the use of armed forces. The coemperors, Honorius and Constantius, called him to court, and he put on a demonstration that proved his power. We would love to know what trick he performed, but the sources only indicate that it was convincing and that even the Christian emperors were willing to employ him to use his powers. Accounts of the magician spread through the palace, and Placidia came to hear of it.[44]

She was furious, claiming that the magician was a pagan and a sorcerer. In 389, Theodosius had passed a law forbidding the practice of magic,[45] and there had been executions of magicians. What made magic most threatening is that people—including Placidia—believed in it. Church councils and barbarian law codes repeatedly banned magical practices. The Council of Elvira pronounced perpetual excommunication on any one who killed by magic, and the Visigothic law codes of the sixth century provided penalties against anyone who performed any kind of magic, incantations, or charms.[46] Thus, Placidia's objections were well within the laws that she cared so much about. What is most interesting about this incident is how she persuaded Constantius to give in to her will.

Placidia told him that she would divorce him if he left Libanius alive.[47] This was a serious threat since Constantius's position at court and his imperial title were linked to his marriage. Romans had traditionally used divorce as a political weapon to shift alliances, and there is no reason to think that Placidia would not have carried out her threat. Constantius did not risk his position, and Libanius

was executed. Placidia demonstrated the ruthless advocacy of Christianity that she had learned at her father's knee, and there is no record on any other magician trying to sell his arts in the court of Ravenna.

Even as he was planning an invasion of the eastern empire to force Theodosius to accept his title, Constantius had a dream that his reign would be short. Seven months after his elevation, in September of 421, he died of pleurisy.[48] Perhaps his dream accompanied the chest pains and shortness of breath that came with the disease; in any case, he knew he was ill, and he died regretting that he had left the battlefield for the court. While Placidia did not mourn the death of her husband, she certainly worried at the loss of the general. Both she and her brother—and most of the Theodosian rulers—depended on a strong soldier to support their rule. Constantius's death, like that of Stilicho before him, left a power vacuum in the army and in the court. To keep herself and her children safe, Placidia first tried to consolidate her hold over her weak brother.

What went on within the palace to reconcile these two half-siblings whose lives so far had been marked by barely hidden animosity? Honorius was weak and unworldly, pampered by his eunuchs, and sexually naïve, since he had never consummated his marriages. The worldly Placidia must have found a way to persuade her brother to be her ally in her widowhood. Whatever had happened behind closed doors to change their feelings toward each other now spilled out into the public in a scandalous way, as Olympiodorus recounts: "Such was Honorius's affection for his sister after the death of her husband Constantius that the absence of restraint in their love for one another and their constant kissing on the mouth caused many people to entertain infamous suspicions about them."[49] It is impossible to believe that anything incestuous was really going on, given Honorius's past and Placidia's constant prayers, but appearances were what mattered in the squares of Ravenna. While people muttered about scandalous behavior, real political instability broke out. The death of Constantius had set off a power struggle that a few kisses between siblings would not still.

The first problem was to identify a new master of the military. Placidia's principal enemy was a general named Castinus, who had fought under Constantius. It was clear that he wanted to replace Constantius as the master of the armies, if not as coemperor. Castinus faced his first test in 422, when Honorius sent him to Spain, where the Vandals had taken advantage of Constantius's death to attack Roman possessions. Castinus, however, was haughty and inept, and he quarreled with his second-in-command, Boniface, the same man who had wounded Athaulf with his javelin. Boniface abandoned Castinus (an unheard-of act in the Roman army) and fled to Africa to build a power base for himself.

Castinus at first was successful against the Vandals, blockading their port in the south, but he soon lost the support of his Visigothic auxiliaries. They betrayed him, and he had to flee to Tarragona.[50] On the one hand, Castinus's failure must have helped Placidia's stature at court for a while, but on the other hand, she was easily blamed for the actions of "her" Visigoths. Fortunately, she had resources and supporters of her own in this power struggle. She had money and the powerful Visigothic guard who had stayed with her for years. She also took over Constantius's private guard, so the forces loyal to her were substantial. Her close advisors included her old nurse Elpidia and her steward Leontius.[51] Finally, and significantly, she gained the support of Boniface, who remained her loyal advocate for years.

Boniface seems an unlikely ally for Placidia, since he had wounded her first husband. But Placidia was always practical, and that incident had happened at war; it had not been a personal attack. Boniface was a brave man and a great warrior. Olympiodorus said he was a man cast "in the heroic mold," which was not a small compliment. The chronicler also characterized him as a "lover of justice and immune to bribes." As an example of his love of justice for everyone, Olympiodorus told the story of a peasant whose wife had been seduced by one of the barbarian allies of Rome. Boniface secretly hurried to the farmer's field, where he found the barbarian and the wife lying together. He cut off the barbarian's head and gave it to the peasant the next day.[52] Here we can see Boniface's reputation for dispensing justice regardless of the status of the petitioner. Bishop Augustine wrote to Boniface, urging him to be a good warrior and praising him for "your good reputation."[53]

Castinus's failure in Spain strengthened Placidia's position at court enough that she was able to get Boniface appointed as Count of Africa. This made him the most powerful official in the region and put him in control of the significant grain supply. Boniface was in a position to be an influential supporter of Placidia for some time. However, Africa was far from Ravenna, and Placidia faced further struggles at home. Castinus returned to court and was able to convince Honorius that his failure in Spain was due to Placidia's treasonous support of the Visigoths, claiming that she had encouraged them to rise up against him. Placidia's supporters—Elpida, Leontius, and a third conspirator named Spadusa, who may actually have been Padusa,[54] wife of the general Felix—urged Placidia to rise up against her brother. She unleashed her guard in the narrow streets of Ravenna. They fought against Honorius's supporters, and "wounds were inflicted on both sides." It is hard to imagine that street fighting had any strategic purpose in the power struggle in the court, but the result was an increased animosity between

Placidia and Honorius: "In the end their enmity became so heated that their hatred was as great as their former love."[55] Honorius was still the stronger of the two, and Placidia was exiled from Ravenna. She gathered her two young children, her Visigothic guard, her household, and what treasure she could carry, and, in the spring of 423, she left the city.

FLIGHT TO CONSTANTINOPLE

Where could she go? Some authors have suggested that she first went to Rome.[56] But she had no support there, and she more than anyone knew how vulnerable one could be in that city. Instead, she left Ravenna through the Golden Gate and went past the cemetery to the port at Classe, a distance of only a few miles. There she hired a ship to take her to Constantinople. She could not expect a good reception there, for the eastern emperor had rejected her elevation to Augusta, but she knew that she and her children were not safe in Italy. She took her chances in the East.

The group left by sea to cross the Adriatic, round Greece, and sail across to Asia Minor. Ships tried to hug the coast and stop at port overnight, but in early spring the voyage was still hazardous because of the storms that could quickly sweep through the region. The safe shipping season did not start until May 1, but Placidia could not wait that long. Indeed, the ship encountered a terrible storm with huge waves that threatened to swamp it. Placidia began to pray, asking John the Evangelist for help.[57] As she had learned from Serena, she offered to trade a building for a blessing, promising to build a church in honor of the saint if he would keep her and her children safe from the storm. The storm subsided, and the ship sailed on to Constantinople. She made good on her vow some years later when she returned to Ravenna.

Constantinople was much the same as it had been when Placidia had left so long ago. The palace still dominated the hill by the shore, and the great street Mesê, where she had ridden in procession as a child, still led through the city squares. The significant difference lay in the massive new land wall. When people in Constantinople heard of the sack of Rome in 410, the emperor decided to build new walls to protect their capital. Theodosius II ordered his praetorian prefect to build an entire new wall a mile and a half west of Constantine's old wall. This allowed for the city to expand substantially as well. The chariot teams—the Blues and the Greens—were put in charge of the work, and 16,000 volunteers, along with hired skilled masons, built the wall. It was about fourteen feet thick, thirty-five feet high, and four and a half miles long, with ninety-six towers. The main gate remained the Golden Gate at the south side of the city. This great wall stood

against all invaders for a thousand years. On this voyage, Placidia did not arrive through the land walls; her ship approached the port, where she could disembark and go to her property.

Placidia knew she would not receive a warm welcome in the court, and she did not repeat her mother's action, arriving at the palace gates only to be refused entry. Placidia likely moved into her own palace that her father had given her and set herself up with all the trappings of a noble household. She had her own residence, her own money, and her private guard of Visigoths. She was also politically astute enough to know that she had to approach her nephew Theodosius slowly and carefully.

Honorius tried to do what he could to stop Placidia's progress. He cut off her funds from her lands in Italy and the provinces. However, Placidia's ally Boniface sent her money from her lands in Africa, and, as Olympiodorus recorded, "he exerted himself in her service in every other way. Later he gave everything he had to help her restoration as Empress."[58] It was essential for Placidia that the money keep flowing. She had to maintain the kind of luxurious household that signaled prestige in Constantinople; a poor "most noble" princess would have been accounted as no princess at all. Furthermore, she had to have money to bribe palace officials and eunuchs if she were to have any access to her family. She owed Boniface a large debt for his loyalty.

Since Honorius could not fully control Placidia's money, he passed laws attacking her Visigoths. In April and again in June, he legislated against Arians, including them in "condemned sects."[59] These laws had no effect on Placidia's guard. There had been a long tradition in Constantinople of leaving the barbarians to their worship, and they even found Arian churches in the great city. Placidia's concern was not Honorius but the eastern branch of the family.

Emperor Theodosius II was Placidia's half-brother Arcadius's son. Like his father, Theodosius had grown up in the huge palace, taught by eunuchs and raised to be a pampered, aloof, godlike figure. He was seven years old in 408 when Arcadius died and he assumed the throne. The court continued as usual, under the control of eunuchs and palace officials, and Theodosius might have become as lazy and inept as Arcadius and Honorius. However, in 412, Theodosius's elder sister, Pulcheria, who was only fourteen years old, took control. She fired his advisors and structured the court to emphasize Christian and intellectual values. She was called the "emperor's guardian" and took control with a determination impressive in one so young.[60]

Pulcheria was a pious Christian and imposed an ascetic practice even within the royal palace. Theodosius and his sisters worshiped together several times a

day, they fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, and the women of the family wore no cosmetics or fancy jewelry. Pulcheria ran the household much as the wealthy Christian matrons in Rome had done fifty years before. She also saw to her brother's education, bringing in the best tutors money could buy. Theodosius turned into a studious young man who loved manuscripts and disputation. His sister did not neglect his public duties either. She made sure he studied swordsmanship and riding, and she worked with him until he mastered the difficult tasks of wearing the imperial clothing and staying aloof while in public.[61] The eastern historian Socrates subtly contrasted him with his father: "this prince though born and nurtured to the empire, was neither stultified nor effeminate by the circumstances of his birth and education."[62]

With political awareness and a desire to protect her brother's reign from any competing claimants to the throne, Pulcheria took a public vow "devoting her virginity to God," and she required her younger sisters, Arcadia and Marina, to take the same vow. Now, any man hoping to marry into the imperial family had to give up. At about the same time, in 414, when Pulcheria was about sixteen years old, her brother (who was only thirteen) raised her to the rank of Augusta. She was now fully empress, with coins struck in her honor and a portrait bust of her placed in the Senate House along with those of Honorius and Theodosius, her fellow emperors. (See fig. 1.1.) A chronicler of the age gave her the highest praise: "she took control of the government, reaching excellent decisions and swiftly carrying them out with written instructions."[63]

The next task for the young empress was to find a suitable bride for Theodosius to ensure the continuation of the dynasty. In June 421, the twenty-year-old Theodosius married a beautiful and well-educated girl, Athenaïs, whose father was a noted philosopher in Athens. It may be that courtiers selected the young woman to weaken Pulcheria's power in the court, but however she was chosen, she was suitable for the educated and bookish Theodosius, who was used to talking to the women of his household. A chronicler described her as "a pure young thing, with slim and graceful figure, a delicate nose, skin as white as snow, large eyes, charming features, blonde curly tresses, and dancing feet, a girl of wit and intellect."[64] The only impediment to the marriage was that Athenaïs was a pagan, but she converted to Christianity, and at her baptism she took the name Aelia Eudocia. She was known as Eudocia.

Theodosius celebrated the wedding with great chariot races in the hippodrome, and the palace held lavish festivities. In the following year, Eudocia gave birth to a girl, named Licinia Eudoxia. Even though his wife had not yet produced an heir, in January 423, Theodosius proclaimed her Augusta. Now her authority

equaled that of Pulcheria, and the court in Constantinople had two empresses. This was the situation when Placidia arrived in the capital in the spring of 423.

Placidia must have approached the court cautiously and politically, holding in her irritation that the two women at court held the coveted title Augusta and that her title was not recognized. She remained the "most noble princess," a title she had held since she was five years old. However, through the spring and into the early summer, she must have joined the pious household in prayers, for an eastern source remarked on her devotion to religion and to churches.[65] She undoubtedly brought her two young children to court, where they may have joined in prayers and study and met little Eudoxia.

The conversations in the court matched Placidia's interests perfectly and included more than the prayers that were so important to her. The court valued laws and recognized the importance of organizing the existing legislation, and perhaps Placidia was able to contribute her opinions on the importance of laws, as she had done with Athaulf. A few years after Placidia left Constantinople, Theodosius appointed a commission to collect all the laws that had been issued since the reign of Constantine and organize them into a formalized system. This *Codex Theodosianus* was completed in 438 and formed the basis for subsequent compilations. It was one of Theodosius's most enduring accomplishments.

In 425, Theodosius, under the influence of his empresses, founded a new university at Constantinople to rival the educational monopoly held by Athens and other older cities. This university had courses taught in Latin and Greek and quickly became a well-funded center of learning. In this accomplishment, one can readily see the hand of Empress Eudocia, the daughter of the professor.

Throughout the court conversations on religion, law, and education, Placidia was probably biding her time before she could press her suit for the restoration of her title and her position in the West. Theodosius (and the empresses) were in no hurry to raise another branch of the family. Theodosius still did not have an heir, and Placidia's son, who carried the imperial name of Valentinian, was a clear rival.

The situation changed on August 27, 423, when Honorius died of "dropsy," the same illness that had claimed his father. Honorius was only thirty-nine years old, and he has been remembered as one of the most incompetent of the late Roman emperors. During his reign, he lost Britain and much of Spain, Rome was sacked, his sister was kidnapped, and he even failed to produce an heir. His death, however, gave Placidia the opening she needed to press her claims for her son.

The events that followed Honorius's death reflect in part the difficulties of taking action in the ancient world when news took weeks to arrive.[66] When Theo-

Figure 5.3. Gold solidus of Galla Placidia
Photo: From the Pythagorean Collection

dosius heard of the death, probably in late September, he at first tried to keep it secret as he made plans. His first reaction was to move troops to Salona to fortify the region in case western armies should approach Constantinople. Theodosius may also have decided to rule both parts of the empire alone, and, toward this effort, he apparently reached an agreement with the general Castinus (Placidia's enemy) that he would act as Theodosius's general in the West. To solidify this agreement, Theodosius named Castinus as consul for the year 424.

This agreement with Castinus offended Placidia and ignored Valentinian's claim to the throne, so Theodosius must have been planning to try to rule alone. However, his support of Castinus also offended Placidia's supporter in Africa, Count Boniface, and this was a dangerous thing to do. No one could govern the west without Africa's grain, and Boniface could easily withhold it. Furthermore, Theodosius did not realize that while he was sending messages to Castinus, the general was backing a usurper.

In November 423, a man named John was proclaimed as emperor in Rome. John had been a notary, a palace official, and seems to have been mild mannered and intelligent. He had received the support of the Senate and of general Castinus. The general must have decided that the presence of his enemy Placidia in Constantinople left him vulnerable and that his fortunes were better placed with a western emperor. John sent an embassy to Theodosius asking that his elevation be recognized, but his ambassadors were punished and his proposal rejected. The Theodosian dynasty demonstrated again that it had no patience with usurpers.

By 424, Theodosius decided he had no more choices. He would rather have someone from the family of Theodosius on the western throne than a usurper. He finally recognized Placidia's title of empress (fig. 5.3) and her son's dignity of "Most Noble." Young Valentinian and the even younger Eudoxia were engaged by "the agreement of the three females who governed the Roman world."[67] In this phrase, the great eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon, noted with some shock the authority of the three empresses of the Theodosian household. By this decision, they had decided that when the two children reached appropriate age, they would marry, formally uniting both sides of the empire. Since Valentinian was so young, the women agreed that Placidia would act as regent for him in the West. The household led by Empress Pulcheria made this solution seem perfectly natural; no one in Constantinople questioned the fitness of an empress to rule in the West until her son grew to majority.

Gold coins were struck with Placidia's image, and, like Eudoxia on her coin, she is shown blessed by the hand of God authorizing her rule. Placidia was now empress of the Romans in name; it remained for her to become so in fact.

CHAPTER 6

Empress of the Romans

424–437

Theodosius II was willing to commit his army to reclaim the throne of the West from the usurper John, but before the army could engage any enemy, a legitimate emperor had to be in place. Therefore, Placidia, with her children, palace officials, and army, stopped at Salonica, the old capital that lay on the road between the eastern and western halves of the empire. Here, in this city that was her birthplace, Placidia watched her son Valentinian be dressed in the robes of a Caesar and raised up to receive acclamations. The gathered soldiers cheered their five-year-old emperor, the next in the dynasty of Theodosius the Great. Valentinian's six-year-old sister, Honoria, watched the proceedings, just as Placidia had when her brother Honorius had been crowned, and it is just as likely that Honoria envied his acclamation. Placidia may have reassured her daughter that her time would come, and it soon did.

Meanwhile, the immediate problem was for the army to secure the throne. Theodosius entrusted the leadership of his army to his general Ardaburius, who had distinguished himself in Theodosius's wars against Persia some years before.[1] Ardaburius shared his command with his son Aspar. The army left Salonica along the *Via Egnatia*, which crossed the southern Balkans along the northern part of Greece to Dyrrachium (modern Durrës on the Albanian coast).

Placidia and the two children joined the army, riding in a large four-wheeled coach, which was the customary conveyance for officials and nobles traveling along the Roman roads. They probably covered the standard twenty miles a day, stopping at inns each night. This was a much more comfortable journey than that which Placidia had experienced traveling with the Goths, and they probably reached the Adriatic Sea in about a week. Then they turned north to follow the

Via Flavia about 300 miles along the road up the Dalmatian coast to the city of Salona. They reached Salona in about another two weeks.

In Salona, the generals set the battle plan. Ardaburius took some ships to sail against Ravenna, while Aspar took the cavalry by land, skirting the Adriatic coast. Aspar moved so quickly against the city of Aquileia that he "outstripped the news of his approach,"[2] and the suddenness of his arrival prevented any defense of the city; he captured it unopposed. Presumably, he rode with an advance guard of his cavalry, with his supplies and the royal carriage following behind. Soon they all arrived in the city, and Placidia took up residence in the imperial palace while Aspar prepared to continue on to Ravenna. Then, they received some bad news: Ardaburius had been captured.

When Ardaburius had sailed off with the fleet, he had encountered a violent storm that raged through the Adriatic and swept his flagship into John's fleet near Ravenna. Ardaburius was captured and taken into Ravenna. Aspar was worried about the safety of his father, and Placidia about the prospects of the invasion. However, a great general can figure out how to make the best of a bad situation, and Ardaburius was resourceful. The success of John's imperial hopes depended on Theodosius's eventual recognition of his legitimacy, and the usurper thought that holding the emperor's valued general hostage might help him achieve that. Therefore, he cultivated Ardaburius's good will, treating him with much courtesy and allowing him full freedom of movement in Ravenna. The shrewd general used this freedom to talk to John's military leaders, persuading them of the benefits of preserving the legitimacy of the Theodosian dynasty, and ultimately "involved them in a conspiracy against the usurper."[3]

Though imprisoned, Ardaburius secretly sent Aspar a message, urging him to come to Ravenna because success was assured. Aspar crossed the marshes quickly with his cavalry, and, after a brief engagement, it was all over. John was captured by his own officers, and the city belonged to Ardaburius and Aspar. As usual, the eastern chronicler Socrates credited the victory as a miracle showing God's blessings on the House of Theodosius. He claimed that, thanks to the prayers of Theodosius, "an angel of God, under the appearance of a shepherd, undertook the guidance of Aspar and the troops . . . through the lake near Ravenna. . . . No one had ever been known to have forded that lake before; but God then rendered that passable, which had hitherto been impassable."[4] In reality, a local shepherd led the way through the marshes, but the Theodosian historian wanted to make sure everyone believed that God was on the side of the new young emperor, Valentinian.

John was sent to Placidia and Valentinian in Aquileia, where the empress ar-

ranged for a public execution. The people gathered in the hippodrome, where John's right hand was cut off—the penalty for treason. Then he was mounted on an ass and forced to ride in a procession, during which he was beaten and taunted by actors hired for the purpose. After his humiliation, John was beheaded.[5]

Placidia and her children set up court in Ravenna toward the beginning of summer 425, and Placidia spent the remainder of the summer arranging her household, removing John's supporters and putting her own advisors in place. Then, in the fall, she planned to go to Rome to invest Valentinian with the imperial robes; he was to be emperor of Rome not just of Ravenna. In October, Placidia and her children entered Rome in a great procession, perhaps riding in the golden chariot that had carried Honorius so often. As the crowds gathered in the Forum, a representative from the eastern court clothed the seven-year-old Valentinian in the robes of emperor. Placidia had now achieved her goal of raising her son to the purple. Shortly after his elevation, his mother ensured that his sister Honoria was also given the title Augusta and had a coin struck in her honor showing her with full imperial regalia.[6] By this act, we can perhaps see echoes of Placidia's anger that her own elevation had been so long delayed; in any case, she made sure her daughter received all the honors held by her brother.

However, the emperor was young, and his success depended upon Placidia's skilled regency. As had been true for her brother, nephew, and all the rulers since her father, Placidia had to decide on generals to command her armies. Her connections with the strong tribe of the Visigoths were helpful, but the situation had changed among the barbarians that surrounded the empire. There was a growing and increasingly powerful threat emerging from the north: the Huns.

THE HUNS RIDE INTO THE FOREGROUND

For fifty years, the Huns had served as the ominous thundering behind the storm of barbarians that had swept into the Roman Empire. The fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus, who is our main source for information about the coming of the Goths into the empire, attributed their movement to the wrath of the Huns, writing, "The seed-bed and origin of all this destruction . . . I find to be this: The people of the Huns, who are . . . quite abnormally savage."[7] It would be hard for any tribe to exceed the savagery of either the Romans or the invading barbarians, but the Huns were particularly frightening because their appearance and culture were so different from those of any other invaders. As the chronicler Jordanes said, to onlookers, they were "scarcely human."[8]

The actual origin of the Huns remains a disputed topic. Some scholars have suggested they were a nomadic people from China, called in the Chinese sources

the Hsiung-Nu (also written Xiongu), who had terrorized the border in the first century A.D., but too much time has passed to identify the Huns directly with those who had threatened the Chinese.[9] Whoever they were exactly, it is certain that they were a people from the steppes. Their warriors rode small, fierce warhorses while their families accompanied them in wagons, driving along flocks of goats and horses.

Westerners found their appearance frightening. Like many peoples who own little, they shaped their bodies with decorations. They scarred children's cheeks, so that when boys grew to puberty, their beards grew in patterned by the scars. Short and squat, they had strong bodies and thick necks; Ammianus said they were "so prodigiously ugly and bent that they might be two-legged animals." The Huns also practiced artificial cranial deformation as part of their body modification. Parents bound infants' heads to elongate the skull toward the back, leading Jordanes to describe their heads as "a sort of shapeless lump, not a head, with pin-holes rather than eyes."[10]

People also define themselves by their clothing, whether it was Goths in their trousers or Romans in their togas, and the chroniclers found the Huns' attire shocking. Like many nomads they had few articles of clothing: Why waste the space to carry a lot? Ammianus scornfully wrote that they wore the same clothing whether they were at home or elsewhere; indeed, he wrote, "once they have put their necks into some dingy shirt they never take it off or change it till it rots and falls to pieces from incessant wear." He said the garments themselves are made of linen or "of the skins of field-mice stitched together." This last claim is unlikely. After all, how many mice would it take to make a garment, and why would one when there are sheep and goats or game available for better skins? However, Ammianus's account was designed to inspire fear in his listeners by showing the barbarity of the Huns, down to the clothing they wore, and field-mouse fur marked them as wholly "other."

In addition to their tunic-length shirts covered with warm capes, the Huns wore round fur caps and goatskin leggings. Their shoes were shapeless because they were not made on a last, a form to hold the shape of the footwear as it was being sewn. Consequently, Ammianus tells us, they could not walk easily. However, sturdy footwear mattered little because they spent their lives on horseback.

Life on the steppes depended on the small, hardy horses that could run all day and were fierce enough to fight off wolves or their riders' enemies. The riders seemed part of the horses; they rode all day and could even sleep deeply while leaning on the horse's neck. Ammianus claims they ate, drank, conducted trade, and debated political matters while mounted. He also describes how they ate raw

meat, warmed and salted only by their horse's flesh, as the meat was kept tucked under their saddle. However, the real advantage of their horsemanship came in battle.

Huns approached a camp with such swiftness that the opponents were surprised at the attack. Then the horsemen wheeled and scattered giving no target for foot soldiers or even slower cavalry. The advantage they derived from their mobility was made even greater by their technologically superior bows. There were plenty of tribes whose soldiers were skilled archers, but the Huns' weapons offered significant advantages. The first improvement on older designs was that the Huns built composite bows. Bowsmiths began with sections of wood upon which they glued other elements, including bone plates on the inside to compress, adding more force to the arrow, and sinews on the outside that stretched with the pull of the bow. These components were glued together with an adhesive made from boiled fish or rabbit bones and carefully dried. Once the bow was finished, it was extremely strong. When unstrung, the bows curved in the opposite direction, so there was additional tension on the bow when it was strung; this shape gave the recurve bow its name. It might take a year to make the perfect bow, but the time was worth it.

The design of the recurve bow had been on the steppes of Asia for thousands of years, but the Huns added a new feature that increased its effectiveness. The longer the bow, the stronger the force of the arrow, but a horseman could not use a bow that was too long or it would hit his horse's neck as he fired. Previous cavalrymen from the steppes had bows about 100 centimeters long (about three feet), but Hunnic bows found in graves were much longer, about 150 centimeters (or about five feet). They managed this new length by a creative design innovation: they made the bows asymmetrical, with the part below the handle shorter than the part above, allowing the rider to shoot freely. Hunnic horse archers might have been effective against unarmored opponents like the Goths from a distance of about 175 meters (or almost 200 yards).[11] Opponents of the Huns were struck down before they knew what was happening and before the Huns came within striking range of their own inferior bows.

After their opponents were weakened by an archery attack, the Huns closed in to fight with swords. While their enemies were counteracting the sword attack, Huns entangled them in lassos made of twisted cloth and tossed with deadly accuracy.[12] It is no wonder that in the 370s, Goths came across the Danube fleeing the Huns and seeking sanctuary in the Roman Empire.

Of course, in time, the Huns, too, looked to gain advantages from Rome, and groups of their soldiers hired themselves out to Goths and Romans alike, serving

as mercenaries in their armies. At times, groups of Huns even tried large-scale incursions. In about 395, they came southeast around the Black Sea to raid in what is now Turkey, causing the eastern armies to deploy in that direction. They also raided in the Persian Empire, and, in 408, the Hunnic king Uldin invaded Thrace, north of Greece, but was forced to retreat.

By the beginning of the fifth century, both halves of the empire began to formulate a policy to deal with the Huns, but negotiation was difficult. Ammianus, in his disparaging way, noted the difficulties in making treaties with the Huns: "You cannot make a truce with them, because they are quite unreliable and easily swayed. . . . They are totally ignorant of the distinction between right and wrong . . . and they are under no restraint from religion or superstition." He did note, though, that they had one bargaining point: "Their greed for gold is prodigious."[13] The empire had gold.

In 421, Placidia's nephew, Theodosius II, and his sister Pulcheria decided to use the Huns' gold lust to buy them off. They set up an annual payment of 350 pounds of gold to buy peace with the Huns. This was an inconsequential amount for Theodosius—not even one wagon load—and within a decade the Huns increased their demands. In 421, however, 350 pounds of gold seemed a goodly sum to the Hunnic kings, who used it to adorn themselves, wearing wealth to demonstrate their power.

The western emperor took a different approach to dealing with the Huns, one that had long-term consequences for Placidia. In the 410s, the Ravenna court sent a hostage to live with the rulers of the Huns. The young man, Flavius Aetius, lived with the royal family for about three years, learning their language and forming a personal relationship—the only kind of relationship that really bound the Huns. Aetius was the son of a distinguished military family. His father, Gaudentius, had served with Stilicho and married a wealthy Italian heiress from a senatorial family. When Aetius was sent as hostage, it was as a high-born Roman who claimed respect from the Huns.[14] He made the most of his time with them, learning to shoot arrows and ride with great skill, and though we do not know exactly where he went when he left the Huns, it was probably to serve in the armies of his father, who was the army commander in Gaul in about 420.

Honorius's death in 423 changed the politics in the West. Would the armies back Placidia, in exile in distant Constantinople, or the usurper John in Ravenna? Gaudentius chose the usurper and sent his son to recruit an army of Huns to back John's cause. Gaudentius was killed in Gaul, but Aetius raised 60,000 Huns and brought them south to reinforce John's armies. When he arrived in early summer

of 425, it was three days after John's execution. He was too late. He and his Huns fought against Aspar's army, and heavy casualties were incurred on both sides.[15] Placidia's victory over the usurper John had been relatively easy, but with the arrival of the Huns, the situation needed political not military skills.

SECURING HER RULE

Placidia called for a meeting with Aetius and other advisors, and the new empress wisely made peace with the general, even though he had supported the usurper. She offered Aetius a military command in her armies, and he negotiated the withdrawal of his Huns. As usual, the Huns were given an unspecified amount of gold and hostages, at which time they "laid aside their anger and their weapons" and returned to their lands in Thrace.[16]

With the threat of the Huns gone for the moment, Placidia turned to assembling her administration. The first order of business was setting up the command of her armies. Like Honorius and all the Theodosians after her father, she needed a general to secure the peace. However, she had seen how powerful figures like Stilicho and Constantius took political power along with their military leadership, and she wanted to avoid that. She decided to divide up the command in hopes that she could achieve a balance of power among her generals, leaving her with the ultimate authority. This plan echoed the triumvirates of Julius Caesar and Octavian, a history she certainly knew, but whether she had a plan to prevent the bloodshed that arose in those competitions remained to be seen.

She gave one command to Aetius. In this, she had no choice, really, since he controlled the increasingly powerful Huns, and it was part of her bargain with him to end his rebellion. Aetius was in his prime. He was about thirty-four years old—roughly the same age as Placidia—an impressive man and a bold soldier. One contemporary wrote, "He was extremely able as a soldier and he was skilled in the arts of peace." He was generous, with no trace of greed, and he shared all the hardship of his troops.[17] In short, he was the perfect Roman general. Placidia did not want him nearby, so she gave him command of the armies across the Alps in Gaul.

She had a second general whose loyalty to her certainly earned him the right to be her military right arm. This was Boniface, Count of Africa, who had sent her money during her exile from Italy and who controlled the flow of the all-important grain. Like Aetius, Boniface was a soldier's general, embodying traditional Roman virtues. The sixth-century chronicler Procopius praised both men, giving them the much-quoted appellation "the last of the Romans" and writing,

"so true was it that all the excellent qualities of the Romans were summed up in these two men."[18] Even if Boniface was trustworthy, Aetius would have objected to his being given a command near Placidia. She kept Boniface in Africa.

That left the important position of master of the military in Italy, commanding both Boniface and Aetius. Placidia chose a relatively unknown man, Constantius Felix, who had commanded an army in Gaul. He was the husband of Padusia, who may have been Placidia's close friend.[19] That might have made Placidia trust that he would not conspire against her. Felix, shown in an image to be a short, stocky, bearded man,[20] did not have a large base of support in the military, and Placidia may have believed he was the safest man to have at her side. But, for the moment the military administration was established in accordance with Placidia's desire to keep her best generals at a distance.

As happened so often during the empire, when rulers changed, warfare broke out in the provinces as tribes tested the mettle of new generals. Constantius had been forced to restore the peace after Stilicho's death, and now Aetius faced the same problem in Gaul. For the next few years, Aetius enhanced his military reputation by maintaining order in the western provinces, pushing back incursions by tribes of Visigoths and Franks. Aetius also had a personal bodyguard of Huns, counteracting Placidia's guard of Visigoths, which served to make the fierce tribe more familiar to Romans.

While her generals were effectively restoring the peace abroad, Placidia turned her attentions to maintaining security at home. She began a building project to fortify and expand the walls that protected Ravenna. New walls extended the old Roman walls eastward, protecting the palace area and strengthening the overall fortifications.[21] These walls have been called the Valentinian Walls, consistent with the convention of naming the construction after the reigning emperor, but since they were built early in his reign, while he was still very young, Placidia must have commissioned the work to avoid future incursions by usurpers or barbarians.

Placidia also had to keep the reign of her son safe from conspiracies emanating from Rome, particularly in the still-respected Senate. She was probably particularly sensitive to the king-making abilities of the Senate, since she had used them to rid herself of Serena. Now she turned her attention to getting the Senate's support. In the ancient world, it was difficult for women to take power, and when they did so, they tended to be conservative. They looked back to the old ways, demonstrating that placing a woman in power was not revolutionary, and they were particularly careful not to alienate the old guard by changing too many things. Placidia fit this pattern in her rule. She supported the noble families in the Senate, and she did so in the most traditional of Roman ways, through the law.

The laws issued during Placidia's regency bear the name of her son, the titular emperor. They also carry the name of Theodosius, since all the laws, whether issued in the East or the West, bore the names of both emperors. These laws offer a window into what was going on in Placidia's mind as she sought to consolidate her rule, but we must interpret them carefully to sort out which were issued under her influence. The laws that specifically refer to the West, like those addressing the Roman Senate, must have come from her court, and, I suggest, from her direct influence. Her most public advisors were military men, not lawyers, so whatever help she got crafting this legislation came from anonymous scribes. In addition, there is a consistent legal vision that emerges from this body of work that began with her influence on Athaulf (as attributed by Orosius) and extended right through to the publication of Theodosius's massive consolidation of laws. In absence of evidence to the contrary—and there isn't any—Placidia must get credit for the legal decisions during her regency, and this analysis can serve to illuminate the empress as she put her hand to administration.

On January 1, 426, young Valentinian III became consul for the year, solidifying his title of emperor. His first act (really his mother's as regent acting in his name) was to present an imperial constitution to the Senate. This constitution was a decree to the Senate, recorded as a law, which set the philosophy of the new emperor. At the most basic level, the decree promised that traditional senatorial rights would be preserved, but it laid out certain specific examples. For example, the decree guaranteed owners' rights over their slaves, giving no mercy for rebellions.[22] A second specific component of the imperial decree probably recalled the storm of petitioners that had come forward after Constantius's death. Now that she was in charge, Placidia condemned all malicious prosecutions, saying, "no informer against the fortunes of innocent persons shall be met." Of course, such a general edict raises the question of how innocence would be determined without an investigation of charges, but it seems that the new administration was signaling that it would not allow a swell of complaints.[23] In general, however, this edict promised the continuation of the ancient rights of senators and assured them that the administration of Valentinian III would support them.

On February 24, 426, Placidia further garnered senatorial support with money. She announced to the Senate that she would return to them a part of the gift senators traditionally gave to the emperor on the first of every year. Furthermore, she donated another portion of the gift of gold to the city of Rome itself, perhaps toward more rebuilding.[24] These early decrees were designed to ensure that she and her son had the support of the Senate, which they duly gave. However, Placidia's interest in the law went beyond the self-interest implicit in these early moves.

The empress showed an interest in the technicalities of inheritance law, since as early as January 30, 426, shortly after her first appeasement of the Senate, she issued a long, complex statute trying to clarify the rights of heirs. It is significant that, in this statute, Placidia emphasized the rights of mothers to inherit the estates of deceased children.[25] We would like to know what had triggered this interest, since it must have been on her mind before she became empress or she would not have addressed it so quickly. It may have grown from conversations with Pulcheria in Constantinople, with women in her household, or even from her own experience with nonsupportive siblings. Whatever spurred her interest, this was only the first of several edicts that showed a concern for legal theory, not just legal applications.

Since the late fourth century, there had been two general approaches to the relationship between the emperor and the law. In one opinion, the emperor was above the law, or rather he *was* the law, so that whatever he did was legal. This position had its roots in the majesty of kings like the Egyptian pharaohs, whose royalty came with a form of divinity. In 284, Emperor Diocletian moved to this model when he decided he would be addressed as "lord," raising himself above his subjects, and subsequent emperors kept the title and cultivated a distance from their subjects through courtly ritual. Placidia kept all the trappings of a lordly emperor, but when it came to the law, she was adamantly a Roman, and an old-fashioned Republican Roman at that. This was the kind of legal reverence she had taught Athaulf and that she was able to articulate when she composed her own laws. The clearest statement of this principle came in 429, when she assured her proconsul in Africa that he must hear appeals even from people on imperial estates, "for We do not disdain that the same law should be shared by Us and private persons." She was not above the law, but she did conclude by reminding all that equality before the law did not mean equality of persons, writing "the reverence due to Our Majesty shall remain unimpaired."[26] This edict showed she had a well-developed theory of the relationship between law and ruler that preserved the integrity of both.

Placidia tried to address another general legal issue that had plagued the empire since its founding. There were so many laws and precedents issued in so many instances that a corrupt judge could rule any way he wanted and still stand by the letter of one law or another. In November of 426, Placidia issued a law that tried to establish a hierarchy of precedents to be used and instructed how a judge was to break a tie when there were an equal number of opposing authorities.[27] This famous "Law of Citations" didn't come close to solving the problem, but it was sophisticated in its attempt and bold in its desire to try to address a problem

that had been growing for centuries in the developing corpus of Roman law. This law became the basis of numerous legal decisions.

Placidia's influential Law of Citations offers a small window into how subsequent historians have had trouble understanding the influence of even a powerful woman. For example, as late as the 1950s, Clyde Pharr, the translator of the Theodosian Code, wrote in a footnote that Galla Placidia was an "unusually able woman" to have drafted this legislation.[28] I am sure Pulcheria and many other educated women of the age would not have found Placidia's learning and ability "unusual." Pharr's comment says more about America in the 1950s than Rome in the fifth century, and it shows the difficulties in removing bias when analyzing women in the ancient world. Placidia was not unique in her age, but her awareness of legal texts and her desire to help sort out injustices were impressive.

Just as Placidia was not unique in her knowledge of legal texts, she was not the only person in the imperial households who was concerned about the state of Roman jurisprudence. In 429, just as she was issuing her legislation, her nephew and Pulcheria established a commission to collect all the imperial constitutions since 313, when Constantine the Great consolidated his rule. Theodosius announced his plan to the Senate in Constantinople, appointing nine learned men to collect the edicts. The senators cheered and offered forty-three acclamations, showing that everyone was ready for some legal reforms.[29] The committee worked for nine years, gathering the laws from East and West and organizing them by categories.

It is impossible to believe that it was simply coincidence that the households in both halves of the empire were interested in legal reforms at the same time. It is more likely that the emperors and empresses either discussed legal reforms when Placidia was in Constantinople or that she corresponded with her corulers once she returned to Ravenna. Either way, Placidia enthusiastically supported the research for the compilation of the new code. The nine scholars collected the laws from the archives of both East and West, and in the course of the collection, they found mistakes of various kinds, for example, in dating or attribution. However, such mistakes are seldom found in the laws issued by Placidia. This evidence suggests that Placidia was careful that a correct version of her laws was sent to the East.[30]

During her first few years of rule as regent, Placidia established a vigorous administration that reflected her interests in law and justice. In her household in Ravenna, while her children were growing up and being educated among the eunuchs and courtiers, Placidia also addressed her other compelling interests: religion, church buildings, and the proper expression of religious ideas.

WORSHIPPING IN RAVENNA

As busy as Placidia was consolidating her administration and turning her attention to legal reform, she never forgot her overriding concern for promoting the Catholic Church. When she returned to Ravenna, Bishop Ursus still presided over the cathedral. He had been the advisor and confessor to Honorius, and now he took up the same role for the empress and her family. She no doubt consulted him on her first task, fulfilling the vow she had made to John the Evangelist during the frightening storm at sea. As soon as she was settled in Ravenna, she began construction on a basilica dedicated to the Evangelist.[31]

Placidia selected a site just north of the palace for her new church. As with her other churches, she spared no expense and hired artists to install magnificent mosaics. Though the church still stands—rebuilt most recently after being damaged by bombs in 1944—sadly, the mosaics are gone, except for a few fragments from the floor. Surviving texts describe mosaic portraits of Placidia's family members in the apse of the church, and her selection of those to be displayed reveals a good deal about her values and, indeed, her self-identification. She included emperors from whom she was descended: Constantine, Theodosius, Valentinian, and Gratian. All these names carried the preface "divine," a way to refer to deceased emperors. The usage was left over from the old pagan days, but it continued to be used in a Christian context by the Theodosian dynasty to show that God blessed their reign. She also included her deceased husband, the "divine Constantius" and her brothers, the "divine Arcadius" and the "divine Honorius." This genealogy conveyed to all viewers the religious legitimacy that protected her reign and that of her children.[32]

There were three more family members memorialized on the mosaic wall, all listed with the title "most Noble." These were labeled Theodosius, John, and Gratian.[33] Since this mosaic showed only deceased family members and the Noble Boys had not ruled (or they would have been listed as "divine"), they must refer to Placidia's brothers, John and Gratian, who had died in infancy, and her own son by Athaulf, Theodosius. She never forgot the beloved infant she buried in Spain. Finally, above the image of family members presumably in heaven was an inscription mentioning the living: "To the holy and most blessed apostle John the Evangelist, the Empress Galla Placidia with her son the Emperor Placidus Valentinian and her daughter the Empress Iusta Grata Honoria fulfill the vow of liberation from the dangers of the sea."[34] The inscription expresses exactly how Placidia perceived herself and reveals her Christian faith. She was proud of the

imperial titles she and her children held, and she reveals her Christian faith and her certainty that her bargain with Saint John had saved the three of them.

Archaeological studies of the church of the Evangelist reveal another strong interest of Placidia's: education. She had just come from the intellectual court in Constantinople, where emperor and empresses gathered scholars and texts and enjoyed intellectual conversation. As she designed her new church, she added a library, testimony to her life-long intellectual interests. Two small chambers flank the apse of Saint John, and they incorporated the best Roman engineering for library construction. They were also equipped with an under-floor heating system, called a hypocaust.[35]

Roman engineers had developed this heating system to use in the great baths that the Romans valued so much. They built a floor suspended on small pillars, creating a basement through which air could flow. The walls above were fitted with hollow ceramic pipes through which warm air passed, venting outdoors. Slaves tended a furnace in the basement, and heat from the furnace heated the floors and walls of the libraries. The amount of fuel in the furnace and the numbers of pipes in the wall determined how hot the room became. The hot baths of the Romans used a lot of heat, but these small libraries did not require as much fuel to dry the humidity and keep the rooms warm. Once the floor and walls were warm, they retained the heat for some time, so it was an efficient way to keep the reading rooms comfortable. This system also kept precious manuscripts dry in the damp climate of Ravenna, and it did so without having to introduce a brazier or other open-flame source near the flammable texts.

The walls of these two rooms were constructed with niches just like those used for manuscript storage in the great ancient libraries at Athens or Ephesus. Placidia also incorporated another aspect of traditional Roman libraries by having one room for Greek texts and one for Latin. This suggests that Placidia had high aspirations for the library, maintaining scholarly study of both languages. The apse between the two rooms was designed for scholarly conversations when church services were not being held. Once her church and library had been built, Placidia must have used it herself and had her children taught there. Unfortunately, the books were lost over the centuries, and even the function of these carefully built rooms was forgotten.

The intellectual life of Ravenna (like Milan before it) was influenced most strongly by the bishop who led the congregation. In 431, the aging Bishop Ursus died, and Ravenna was reinvigorated by the appointment of Bishop Peter, who held the position for the rest of Placidia's life. Peter was known for his rhetorical

skill, and his short sermons are models for engaging and educating an audience. He became known as Peter Chrysologus (Peter Golden Orator), giving Ravenna a counterpart to Constantinople's famed bishop John Chrysostom (Golden Mouthed). Peter's sermons have been collected, and he was named a saint and "Doctor of the Church"; his writings are worthy of study. In 431, Placidia heard his first sermon, in which he praised her faith, charitable works, and general holiness,[36] and the two entered into a mutually supportive relationship for the rest of their lives.

Shortly after Peter became bishop, Placidia contracted a mosaic artist to add his image to the apse of Saint John the Evangelist right over the bishop's chair. The image, now lost, showed Peter with a long beard, raising his hands as if he were singing the mass while an angel faced him receiving his prayers.[37] The mosaic also showed the bishop flanked by books, just as in life he presided over the library that Placidia so lovingly built.[38]

Placidia's contributions to the church in Ravenna and elsewhere did not end with Saint John the Evangelist. In her Christian belief, every gift she offered the church was given in hopes of receiving blessings, and she continued to contribute lavishly, in the expectation of God's continued grace. She built a church dedicated to Saint Stephen in neighboring Rimini (it no longer stands), and she contributed to the upkeep and improvement of numerous churches in Ravenna, Rome, and other cities. She also used her wealth to offer artifacts to the churches, some so lavish that the ninth-century historian of Ravenna, Agnellus, mentions them with wonder. For example, Placidia consecrated a church and "endowed it with gold and silver and golden crowns and most precious gems and gold chalices." Agnellus mentions one particularly lavish chalice that had the following inscription engraved on the rim: "I the empress Galla Placidia offer to St. Zacharias."[39] Here again she made clear that *she* made the donation and designated which saint she expected to respond with appropriate blessings.

Throughout Placidia's regency, there were many laws issued on the subject of religion, but since all the laws were issued jointly in the names of the two coemperors, Theodosius II and Valentinian III, it is impossible to know which laws were initiated by Placidia's court. It is easier to separate the laws regarding taxation and other matters that relate specifically to regions of the empire, since those relating to western provinces were Placidia's. The religious laws, on the other hand, had more universal application, and both empresses, Placidia and Pulcheria, were extremely interested in forwarding Catholic worship.

Most of the religious laws continue Placidia's father's original policy of stamping out non-Christian worship, and they expand on it by suppressing the ever-growing list of heresies, ideas that had been condemned by the official church.

Some of the laws are fairly straightforward, like this one, issued in 425: "Confiscation is the punishment for heresy, perfidy, schism, pagan superstition, or other errors hostile to the catholic faith."[40] However, once disputes came before the courts, complexities became apparent, as in a law issued in 428, which acknowledged that all heretics "should not be punished in like manner." It then tries to distinguish among them in ways that must have been almost impossible to enforce. It says, for example, that "Arians, Macedonians, and Apollinarians, who have incorrect views about Christ," cannot have church buildings. "Novatians and Sabbatians" may keep their buildings but not construct new ones. Other groups, with a bewildering list of names like Audians, Hydroparastatans, Tascodrogitans, and others, cannot have public assemblies. Manichaeans are to be expelled from the cities.[41] The laws issued during these years reveal how the unity of church and state under this dynasty used all the legal remedies, from confiscation to fines to exile, to try to bring a uniformity of belief to what was now the great Christian/Catholic empire of Rome. The laws also show the range of disagreements that arose as the church tried to identify each element of proper belief. This is a problem that continued throughout the history of the church.

While most of the laws dealt with beliefs, one law that addressed Christian practice tells us about the cycle of worship during the course of the year and the beginnings of the celebration of Christmas (Christ's Mass). This law was issued in 425 in the names of Theodosius II and Valentinian III and was intended to raise Christian celebrations over any pagan ones: "All theatres and circuses are to be closed on all Lord's Days [Sundays], Natal Day, Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost. . . . All Jews and Pagans must respect these days." The law concludes with the strong statement, "the emperors are best shown devotion when the entire empire worships the omnipotent God."[42] This conclusion was written to remind everyone that the Theodosian rulers governed because God was on their side, and this principle guided not only religious ideas but also the practice of Christian worship throughout the year. By the fifth century, most of the holy days that marked the modern annual cycle of the church had been established.

From the earliest years of Christianity, Easter was the major celebration. The heart of the Christian faith was the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, with its promise that all who followed Him would also rise. This is why baptism had been linked to this most-holy of days. Sundays, too, had long been reserved for Christian worship, marking a time when Christians separated themselves from Jews, who kept the Sabbath starting Friday night. After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Christians wanted to identify themselves as different from Jews, so they adopted Sunday, the first day of the week, as a weekly reminder of Easter and the

resurrection. Placidia with her children and the imperial household went to the Ursiana Cathedral every Sunday morning to worship and receive blessings from the bishop, and they participated in the other major feasts that marked the cycle of the year.

Pentecost commemorated the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Christ, when the Holy Spirit was said to have descended on his disciples. This feast day also grew out of the Jewish practice of celebrating harvests, as well as out of Moses's receipt of the Law from God. Augustine explained the difference between the Jewish and Christian feasts of Pentecost by saying that Jews received the gift of the Law while Christians received the gift of the Holy Spirit.[43] Christians who were baptized at Easter wore their baptismal robes for the fifty days until Pentecost,[44] sanctifying that whole season for them. Augustine wrote that Easter and Pentecost were the most important feasts in the Christian calendar, indeed the only ones that had strong scriptural authority.[45]

The newest feast days mentioned in the law of festivals were the related feasts of Epiphany and the Natal Day. Epiphany was the older of the two. Epiphany comes from the Greek word for "appearance," which means the moment Jesus showed his divinity, but at first there was no consensus about what marked that moment. At first, the faithful celebrated Epiphany on various days, marking everything from Jesus's baptism, to the wedding of Cana, where Jesus performed the miracle of turning wine to water, to the feeding of the five thousand to the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus. All those events recognized and demonstrated Jesus's divinity. In the mid-fourth century, Christians in the city of Rome began to limit the feast of the Epiphany to the day of the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus, the day of the earliest recognition of his holiness. They slowly settled on January 6 as this day. As we shall see, focusing on the visit of the Magi was tied to an increasing emphasis on Jesus's birth.

The cycle of Christian celebrations from January 6 through the spring celebrations of Easter and Pentecost left a glaring problem for Christians who wanted to restrict pagan practices, particularly in the city of Rome. Pagans loved their December festivals, specifically Saturnalia, which lasted a week and roughly coincided with the winter solstice. Saturnalia, originally an agricultural festival to honor the god Saturn, traditionally began with a mass animal sacrifice on December 17 at the temple of Saturn. This was followed by a huge banquet for the whole city. The rest of the week was given over to riotous parties, and all shops, law courts, and schools were closed. Even normal rules of behavior were suspended; public drunkenness and gambling were allowed, and for one day of the week, slaves were treated as equals. Another popular custom associated with

Saturnalia was the exchange of gifts, especially to children. Even though Theodosius the Great had banned all pagan worship back in 385, people continued to celebrate Saturnalia, and Christians treated it as a secular holiday rather than a religious one. Peter Chrysologus preached a sermon in Ravenna in which he quoted Christians who celebrated the New Year, saying, "All this is not practice of the sacrilegious rites, but only a desire to take part in the sport. . . . It is the beginning of the year, not the insult of paganism."[46] Banning this popular winter celebration was to fight a losing battle.

Saturnalia's popularity led to philosophical speculation about its meaning, perhaps trying to give it some loftier purpose than just being a giant party. In about 430, a Roman named Macrobius wrote a long work called *Saturnalia* in which guests gathered at a holiday feast and discussed various topics, summarizing much traditional knowledge. Macrobius was a pagan contemporary of Placidia's, so his work offers a significant glimpse of the holiday that remained so important to the Romans. The poet, a Platonist, explained that the proximity of the holiday to the winter solstice indicated that really all the divinities were subsumed under a monotheism of sun worship; as he wrote, "The Whole is One."[47] He did not see the sun as an actual god but as a representation of an abstract deity whose blessings permeated the earth and everything in it. After chapters proving the monotheism of sun worship, the listeners praised the speaker, saying that he alone "knew the secrets of the nature of godhead."[48] Macrobius did not mention Christianity in his catalogue of deities; he was probably too politic to do so in the reign of the pious Placidia. However, his analysis of the underlying meaning of the popular holiday made it easy to make the birth of Jesus the reason for the celebration; the pagan tradition became a monotheistic celebration of the return of the Son of God to a dark world.

The first evidence of the celebration of Christ's birth in Rome came in the year 336. Gregory of Nazianzus introduced the Nativity celebration to Constantinople in 379, and Egypt accepted the festival in 431. Alexandria and Jerusalem did not celebrate until sometime after 430, so the celebration of Christ's birth was relatively slow in spreading. Even in the West, where the nativity had been celebrated the longest, bishops warned people not to stress Jesus's birth over his death and resurrection. As late as 400, for example, Augustine wrote that "the day of the Lord's birth does not possess a sacramental character, but is only a recalling of the fact that He was born."[49] Sacrament or not, people loved their midwinter celebration.

The remnants of the old sun veneration and the linking of the Nativity celebration with Saturnalia were not fully stamped out until long after Placidia's

death. As late as about 440, Pope Leo gave a sermon on the occasion of the Nativity in which he condemned the "foolish practice" of people who bow to the sun even on the steps of Saint Peter's church before they enter for the Nativity mass. He preached, "This objectionable practice must be given up by the faithful, and the honour due to God alone must not be mixed up with those men's rites who serve their fellow-creatures."[50]

The increasing celebrations of the Nativity brought greater theological problems than simply whether people were celebrating the return of the sun as well as the Son. By focusing on the birth of Jesus, church leaders began to speculate on exactly how the incarnation—that is, the existence of God in the flesh—worked. In the course of their speculations and sermons, the church entered into a dispute that raged throughout the rest of Placidia's life and engaged the energies of all three empresses in the East and West.

THE VIRGIN MARY AND THE BABY JESUS

When Placidia was frightened of the storm at sea, she prayed to Saint John the Evangelist; when Serena prayed for Stilicho, she offered promises to the martyr Nazarius. No one prayed to the Virgin Mary for help. Of the churches that were built from the time of Constantine in the early fourth century through the turn of the fifth century, no church in the West was dedicated to Mary; all were dedicated to saints, apostles, or (thanks to the efforts of Helena) to the Holy Cross. By the twelfth century, all cathedrals in Europe were dedicated to Mary, and the beginning of this huge shift in piety came during the reign of Placidia and the eastern empresses. There was not one simple cause for the elevation of Mary but rather several contributing factors—powerful empresses, a new emphasis on Christmas, and the deep misogyny of a bishop in Constantinople. Theological questions arose that once again led to heresies, church councils, and more divisions within Christendom.

There had been some theological discussions of Mary before the early fifth century, and these mainly concerned her flesh as a promise of Christ's humanity and her life as a model of virginity. There was little written about Mary in the Gospels and Acts, the earliest accounts of the growth of Christianity.[51] The evangelists simply described Christ's birth then moved to the central mystery, his death and resurrection. Mary's role seemed peripheral. In the second century, however, the early church was in a serious struggle about the nature of Jesus. Gnostics, who had a substantial following, believed that Jesus was wholly God and that his flesh was at best an illusion. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote a long, definitive refutation of Gnosticism in his work, *Against Heresy*, in which he emphasized

Mary as the vehicle through which God planned to save humanity. For Irenaeus, Mary was a second Eve; the first lost her virginity and destroyed humanity, the second, through her preserved virginity, saved us. This parallel would continue through Christian theology to elevate the role of Mary in our salvation. But for Irenaeus, the point was her flesh and her humanity. Christ was born precisely to become human; if the Gnostics were right, then Christ needn't have lowered himself to be born at all. Thus, the pregnancy of Mary was proof of Christ's humanity.[52]

The earliest examples of Mary in art reveal the preoccupation with her role as an embodiment of Christ's humanity. In the second-century catacombs in Rome, she is portrayed three times at the moment of the annunciation, that is, when the angel Gabriel told Mary she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit. Christians recognized that this moment of the annunciation represented the Incarnation, the moment when God was joined with Mary's human flesh, and it was the singular point that defined them as different from Gnostics, who were competing for the soul of the church. The annunciation remains the most popular subject for artistic portrayals of the Virgin Mary.[53] The proof of the incarnation manifested in Mary's pregnancy stayed in the theological lexicon long after people had forgotten the Gnosticism that spawned the argument.

A second impulse for the veneration of the Virgin Mary lay in the praise of virginity that had become a popular religious theme by the fourth century. We have seen how Christian women in Rome renounced their sexuality to dedicate themselves to God.[54] Church fathers praised the virgin life and these influential women, and they chose Mary as an obvious model. Ambrose, for example, wrote, "Who could be nobler than the Mother of God? Who more splendid than she, whom Splendor chose? Who more chaste than she, who gave birth to a body without bodily contact?"[55] Other fathers, like Jerome, also continued the theme of praising a life of dedicated virginity using the model of Mary. Such praise offered practical political benefits in an age ruled by the Theodosian dynasty. We have seen how the eastern emperor's sister Pulcheria took a vow of perpetual chastity and became Theodosius II's advisor. The emperor had no fear that his sister would marry and threaten his throne. The praise of chastity and the elevation of Mary as its model offered a justification for the high-born virgins' lifestyle, and it also encouraged a deep respect for these virgins.

Thus, at the beginning of the fifth-century, the Virgin Mary was praised as the bodily vehicle for the incarnation and the perfect model of chastity for those women who chose that path. She was not considered a mediator through whom prayers might be addressed, which is why Placidia and others built no churches

dedicated to her. Prayers continued to be sent through the apostles and martyrs who had left holy remnants of themselves on Earth. There were no relics from the Virgin. However, Mary's elevation to mediator took a step forward at the beginning of the fifth century in another theological debate that split Christendom: Was she Mother of God or just the mother of a human baby?

In 428, Theodosius appointed a priest from Antioch named Nestorius to be bishop of Constantinople. Nestorius was an avid proponent of a church unified in belief and worship, and as soon as he became bishop, he announced to Theodosius, "Give me, my prince, the earth purged of heretics, and I will give you heaven as a recompense."[56] Even the Christian chronicler Socrates criticized the fanatical bishop, writing, "he could not rest, but seeking every means of harassing those who embraced not his own sentiments."[57] The intransigent Nestorius became most famous for beginning the controversy over the nature of the incarnation.

Nestorius's troubles began in the misogyny that he brought with him to the capital from his monastery in Antioch. Only five days after he had been appointed bishop, he came into conflict with the empress Pulcheria, whose authority he had underestimated. Pulcheria arrived with her brother the emperor at the sanctuary of the basilica near the palace where she was accustomed to take communion with the priests and her brother. Nestorius forbade her entrance, saying a woman could not enter. She asked, "Why? Have I not given birth to God?" equating her role with that of the Virgin Mary. Nestorius replied, "You? You have given birth to Satan!" and he drove her from the sanctuary.[58] At this point, Pulcheria became his implacable enemy, but she needed a public issue upon which to confront him. It did not take long to find one.

During a sermon on the infant Jesus, Nestorius said, "Let no one call Mary 'Mother of God [or 'she who gave birth to God'] for Mary was but a woman, and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman."[59] This statement was consistent with his attitude toward Pulcheria—and other women, whom he had banned from singing psalms as had been the custom—but it got in the way of a growing affection for the Virgin Mary and her infant Jesus, as a celebration of the Nativity began to rival Easter in popularity. Nestorius later said, "I cannot term him God who was two and three months old."[60]

As the controversy escalated, Nestorius insisted that God could not have a mother; pagan deities might have mothers but not the Christian God. He offered a compromise to try to quell the uproar. He suggested that Mary could be called "Mother of Christ," but his opponents accused him of splitting the infant Jesus, turning him into a human son born of Mary and a divinity who had not been.

This seemed to mean that the incarnation—when the Word had actually become flesh—had not happened in the womb, and, if this were true, then the Nativity was reduced in importance since God had not been delivered of Mary.

A priest named Proclus expressed the opposite opinion. In a Nativity sermon in 428, he praised the Virgin Mary and the celebration of Christ's birth: "The mystery it [feast of nativity] celebrates is the boast of the whole race of women and the glory of the feminine."[61] The battle lines were drawn; the opposition to Nestorius was led by Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, who wrote many letters and sermons defending Mary as Mother of God, and a number of the important ones were addressed to the empresses in Theodosius's court.

That the two antagonists came from Antioch and Alexandria was significant because it added another component to the conflict: Who was the leader of the church? From the time of Constantine, there was a sort of consensus that the religious leaders of the major cities in which the apostles founded churches, along with the bishop of the imperial city of Constantinople, should guide the church. The bishops of these cities in the East were called patriarchs, and the Bishop of Rome was called pope. The patriarchal cities were Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, and there was a slow but ongoing struggle for power among them. This struggle for the status of the Virgin Mary was also fueled and made more virulent by the rivalry between the two patriarchal bishops of Antioch and Alexandria.[62] The pope in Rome brought his significant prestige to the fray and behind this, the power of the empresses both east and west. It is not surprising that the battle was intense, given the political and theological implications of the outcome.

The western court participated in the controversy, so we can assume that the eastern court did, too. There is no surviving correspondence from Placidia on the topic, but she must have been informed by her relatives and kept current on the discussions. The pope in Rome, Celestine, weighed in against the fiery preacher Nestorius. The pope issued a letter excommunicating Nestorius unless he disavowed all his teachings.[63] We can be more certain of Placidia's interest through studying the sermons of Peter Chrysologus in Ravenna, for he always spoke in the shadow of her influence. Peter brought his rhetorical skills to the defense of Mary and her Virgin Birth, using a language of strong physicality that might have appealed to mothers like Placidia. He invited Christians to imagine the "very hands of God fashioning for himself the holy temple of a body within the womb of the mother." He spoke of Mary's "venerable womb" but warned listeners not to "pry too much into this virgin's conceiving but believe it."[64] Peter has more sermons

on the incarnation than he does on the Nativity because the raging question lay precisely in Mary's womb, not in the manger.

The emperor Theodosius was not so ready to condemn his bishop Nestorius. He used his authority to summon the bishops to an ecumenical council to be held in June 431 in the city of Ephesus. Theodosius sent his military support to ensure that the peace would not be violated, and, with such powerful friends, Nestorius was confident that he might prevail. However, Pulcheria also had some influence in the outcome, and the choice of location for the council was significant. Ephesus was a magnificent city of marble on the coast of modern Turkey, and modern visitors can still see something of its former glory. This ancient city had been dedicated to the virgin goddess Artemis, against whose worship Saint Paul had preached in the great theater that stood by the long marble street. It was also the Christian city of the Virgin Mary; she purportedly lived there after Jesus's death, and the city was one of the earliest to devote itself to the cult of the Virgin, perhaps because the cultural shift from the virgin Artemis to the Virgin Mary was an easy one. Probably sometime in the fourth century, Christian congregations in Ephesus took over the southern end of an old temple dedicated to Hadrian, restored it, and used it as a church, the first in the world to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Council attendees landed in the prosperous, ancient harbor at Ephesus and went just a short distance to meet in this church dedicated to the Virgin.

If Theodosius tried to influence matters by sending his soldiers to support Nestorius, he appeased his sister and wife by choosing Ephesus as the site of the council. Pulcheria, wiser than her brother, counted on affection for the Virgin to carry the day over soldiers' arms. Those attending knew of the dispute between Theodosius and his sister on this topic,[65] so the political stakes were as high as the religious ones. Not surprisingly, the council held in the church of Mary condemned Nestorius, and women marched in the marble streets cheering the results. However, Nestorius's supporters reversed the findings, so the decision reverted to Constantinople, to the divided household of Theodosius and Pulcheria. Crowds assembled in the church near the palace, cheering the empress: "Many years to Pulcheria! She it is who has strengthened the faith!"[66] Theodosius gave in to his sister and to the Virgin Mary, who was proclaimed once and for all the Mother of God. Nestorius was exiled, and he continued defending his position for the rest of his life. Many of his followers left as well, and almost 1,000 years later, when travelers from the West went as far as China, they encountered Nestorian Christians, who on Christmas Day celebrated the birth of a boy who only later took on the mantle of God.

In 431, eastern and western empresses alike rejoiced in the vindication of the

Figure 6.1. Annunciation of the Virgin Mary. Triumphal Arch, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, ca. 435.
(Photo: © Adrian Fletcher, paradoxplace.com)

Virgin Mary. Pulcheria built three churches in Constantinople dedicated to the Virgin Mary and searched to find relics to place within them. She acquired a robe that was supposed to have been Mary's, and even more valuable was an icon of the Virgin that Eudocia (Theodosius's wife) had brought from Jerusalem and that was said to have been painted by the Evangelist Luke. This icon became the most famous in Constantinople, and the Mother of God (the *Theotokos)* became the main protectress of Constantinople.[67]

Rome joined in the celebration of the enhanced status of Mary. Pope Sixtus III, who had been recently consecrated in July 432, commissioned a new church to commemorate Mary's newly confirmed status as Mother of God, and this became the first large basilica in her honor in the West. Sixtus called this church Santa Maria Maggiore (Saint Mary Major) and included a dedicatory inscription on the triumphal arch, crediting himself with the accomplishment. There are no documents to connect Placidia with this church, but it is hard to believe that she did not influence its construction and perhaps contribute money. Sixtus III maintained a close relationship with the empress, obtaining rich gifts for Saint Peter's and Saint John Lateran churches, and his building this church dedicated to the Virgin Mary must have endeared him to her.

Like other churches of the age, no expense was spared on the magnificent

interior mosaics, which became the most influential feature of this new church because they include the earliest representations of the Virgin Mary as a queen instead of as a modest Jewish girl. Artists depicted instances in the life of the Virgin in glittering stones and dressed Mary as a dark-eyed empress wearing imperial robes. In one image (fig. 6.1), Mary bears a striking resemblance to Empress Placidia (as shown on the cover illustration to this book), down to her pearl earrings.[68] Through this image, Placidia's influence continued into the future of Western art.

Santa Maria Maggiore was also a church created to celebrate motherhood and the Nativity, the increasingly popular holiday that spawned the controversy in the first place, because the crypt featured what was purported to be a piece of wood from the Jesus's crib. By appealing to the patronage of the empress, Pope Sixtus III moved the cult of the Virgin Mary to the forefront in the West, and Rome joined Ephesus as a center of her worship. Santa Maria Maggiore remains a much-visited church today.

Despite the celebrations following the Council of Ephesus in 431, the theological issue was not yet resolved. On the feast day of the Nativity, people acknowledged the birth of God, but they still hadn't work out exactly what that meant. Late in Placidia's life, the question would be revisited with more controversy. However, early in her regency, as much as she would have liked to focus on religious issues, political problems once again consumed her attention.

THE FRAGILE PEACE IS BROKEN

Placidia's plan to divide military power among her three generals, Aetius, Boniface, and Felix, was theoretically a good idea, but in practice it was difficult to balance power. The problems began immediately with the general closest to her. If Placidia thought that her friendship with Felix's wife, Padusia, would ensure his good behavior, she was wrong. Almost as soon as he took office, Felix began some violent intrigues that disturbed the peace in Placidia's court. Felix arranged the murder of Patroclus, Bishop of Arles, who had been a particular favorite of hers. Choosing this method for eliminating his critics, the general also organized the murder of a deacon of the Roman church.[69] It is hard to understand why Placidia did not take action against Felix. Perhaps she needed him as a control over the other two generals or maybe her friendship with Padusia made her overlook the murders. Soon, however, Felix engaged in a more serious scheme against Boniface in North Africa.

As was to be expected with a career soldier, Boniface's life was marked by changing fortunes, detailed in letters from Augustine. At the beginning of Bon-

iface's tenure in 418, Augustine wrote to him that he took "great pleasure in your good reputation."[70] Indeed, his loyal support of Placidia and his honest management of his affairs in Africa had marked him as a Roman of high integrity. In 420, his wife died, and the general underwent a personal and spiritual crisis. Boniface wanted to resign his post and enter a monastery to devote the rest of his life to God. He met with Augustine, who, selfishly, told him that God needed his services as a soldier to defend the North African churches so that Christians could "lead a quiet and peaceable life."[71] The bishop told the soldier to do his duty while living his life as a monk, embracing chastity and avoiding the accumulation of wealth.

Such a life might have been possible within a monastery but not in the household of the most important general in the province. Boniface married again. Pelagia, his wife, was a beautiful wealthy woman who happened to be an Arian Christian. Boniface made her convert to Catholicism before their marriage, but she reverted to Arianism after the ceremony. Their daughter was baptized into the Arian church, and Augustine related with horror the rumor he had heard that Pelagia even encouraged nuns to be rebaptized as Arians. He also recounted rumors that Boniface was taking concubines to his bed in violation of his marriage vows. The bishop further reprimanded Boniface for allowing his soldiers to raise money and become wealthy in the province.[72]

All these rumors must have reached Ravenna, and they gave Felix the weapons he needed to try to bring down his rival. While Boniface told Augustine that these rumors were false and that he was being maligned, the bishop refused to take his side. Felix recalled Boniface to Italy to answer charges, but the general refused, assuming that once he was in Felix's hands, he was lost. These theoretical battle lines turned into real ones as Placidia permitted Felix to send troops to Africa to bring down Boniface.

Beginning in 427, Felix sent forces to Africa with no decisive result. As the Roman armies fought a civil war in North Africa, Augustine complained that bands of "African barbarians with no one to oppose them" ravaged and looted widely.[73] Finally, Placidia wisely decided to end this struggle between her generals. She sent Darius, a high official of her court, to negotiate a truce. The peace negotiations may have been aimed in part at Pelagia, the Arian Goth, because Placidia sent an Arian clergyman, Maximus, with the entourage. It may also be that Placidia had met Pelagia when she was with the Visigoths in Gaul.[74] The mission was successful; peace was restored. Boniface was confirmed in the rank of Count of Africa, and the armies of Felix were recalled to Ravenna. The aging and ill Augustine wrote a letter to Darius, praising his ability to "destroy war with

a word" rather than a sword.[75] Peace came, but the damage had been done. Boniface, Africa, and even Felix were fatally weakened.

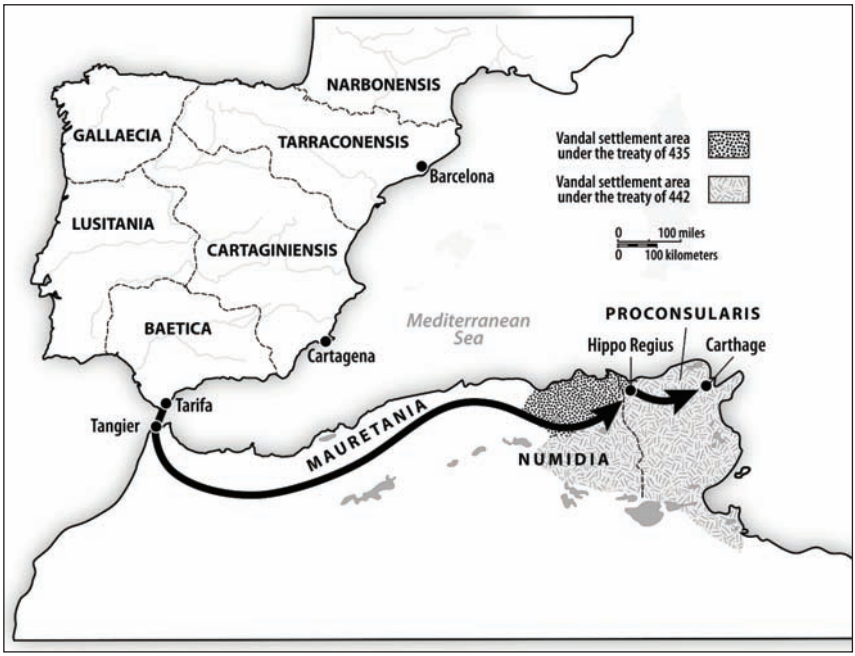
Felix had to reassure the empress of his loyalty and value after the debacle against Boniface, and in 429, Felix and Padusia purchased a mosaic for the Lateran Church in Rome, fulfilling the principle so advocated by Placidia: buildings for blessings. She responded by offering Felix her forgiveness and a promotion to patrician rank. Balance-of-power politics required that she not neglect Aetius, since he had been so successful in stabilizing the military situation across the Alps, so she promoted him to master of the soldiers in Gaul.

Once Aetius had heard of Felix's plots against Boniface, he knew he had no reason to trust the man. Sure he would be the next target, Aetius sent men to conspire with the troops stationed in Ravenna. In May 430, as Felix was leaving the great Basilica Ursiana, he was slain by rioting troops. The soldiers also killed his wife Padusia and a deacon of the church.[76] One can only imagine Placidia's horror at this crime on her doorstep. The beautiful church was defiled by blood, her good friend was dead, and the general who was to have kept the other two strong soldiers at bay was cut down. She could not call on Boniface because the situation in Africa had deteriorated to a shocking degree.

In 429, Vandals had crossed from Spain into Africa. It shouldn't have been surprising because barbarian leaders long had wanted to cross into North Africa to establish themselves in that rich land. As early as 419, the emperors Honorius and Theodosius II had issued a law decreeing capital punishment for anyone who taught the barbarians how to build ships.[77] Such a law demonstrates the limits of legal remedies, for since the Vandals had settled in southern Spain in 411, their close proximity to the rich ports there ensured that they would become mariners. In 429, Boniface's weakness in Africa, along with the incursions of the African tribes from the hills and Aetius's strength in Gaul and Spain, made all the conditions right for the Vandals to leave.

The Vandals had an additional advantage: their king Geiseric. He was a remarkable leader, who made his invasion even more successful than it might have been. Geiseric was of moderate height, and he walked with a limp because of a fall from his horse. However, his character was what set him apart. As a chronicler described him, "He was a man of deep thought and few words, holding luxury in disdain, furious in his anger, greedy for gain, shrewd in winning over the barbarians."[78]

The question that plagued later chroniclers was: How did this man, with only about 80,000 followers and most of those noncombatants, cross into Africa and successfully conquer? The sixth-century author Procopius decided the only ex-



Vandals and North Africa, 429–442
(Art by Katina Daanen)

planation was treachery. He claimed that Boniface invited the Vandals in, and he blamed Placidia for being gullible in trusting Boniface and allowing the invasion to occur.[79] In fact, in 429, Boniface had already made peace with Placidia and would have had no reason to aid the Vandals; he had everything to lose and nothing to gain by that action. No, Geiseric accomplished his invasion with no help from the Romans.

His first problem was crossing the strait from Spain to North Africa. Geiseric selected the shortest distance between the continents, gathering his people at the Spanish port of Tarifa. From there, they would cross to Tangier, just out of sight over the horizon, some thirty-eight miles (sixty-two kilometers) away. From May 429 onwards, a series of ships crossed the Strait of Gibraltar many times, bringing Geiseric's people over in small groups. A crossing would have taken under twenty-four hours,[80] and since we don't know how many ships Geiseric had at his disposal, we can't know how long it took for him to move his 80,000 people, horses, equipment, carts, and oxen to pull them. We know he was patient; it may have taken months, but it was accomplished.

Why didn't the Roman army stop him when he was at his most vulnerable,

during the landing? Because Geiseric chose the perfect landing site. Tangier was the capital of Rome's westernmost province in North Africa, Mauretania Tingitana (modern Morocco). It came under the responsibility not of Boniface, the Count of Africa, but of the Count of Tingitana. He only had about 7,000 men under his command, and they were there to monitor the nomads, the Berbers or the Tuareg people.[81] As soon as he learned of the landing, he must have decided not to challenge Geiseric's army, hoping they would move on. And move on they did.

The line of carts, horsemen, and pedestrians moved eastward toward the richer lands around Carthage. They followed the Roman road along the coast, skirting the mountainous Atlas range to their south. They moved slowly as they covered the almost 1,200 miles (2,000 kilometers) to Numidia, probably only averaging about four miles (six kilometers) a day.[82] The sources are largely silent about their progress through the less populated province of Mauretania, as they headed toward Numidia and Africa Proconsularis, the wealthy prize of Roman Africa.

At the beginning of the invasion, the Roman court was not particularly concerned with this movement of Vandals (with some of their allied Alans). Tribes had been moving and settling in the empire for over fifty years. They settled and, with their relatively small numbers, didn't take up much space, and they became citizens of a transformed empire. During Aetius's campaigns in Gaul, for example, he was imposing peace, not trying to evict barbarian tribes from imperial lands. If Geiseric had stayed in Mauretania and settled with his people, not much would have been done. However, he had a different plan; he wanted to replace Roman rule with his own.

The first clue to his plan came with the violence that accompanied his invasion. An eyewitness chronicler, Victor of Vita, who wrote late in the fifth century, described the destruction. Victor was not objective; he wanted to horrify Catholics in the courts of Ravenna and Constantinople so they would send forces to retake North Africa. In spite of his bias, his account does reveal how this invasion differed from previous ones. These Vandals were Arian (like most of the other barbarians), but they wanted to impose their religion on their new territory. By persecuting Catholics, Geiseric demonstrated that he was bringing a new regime rather than establishing a parallel settlement.

Victor describes the usual devastation of invading armies, "bringing everything to ruin with fire and murders," but this time, the invaders attacked churches and religious people (unlike the Goths, who had exempted churches when they invaded Rome). According to Victor, they "gave vent to their wicked ferocity with great strength against the churches and basilicas of the saints, cemeteries, and

monasteries," breaking into churches and burning down sanctuaries.[83] The Vandals did not spare Catholic churchmen either. Victor describes "distinguished bishops and noble priests" tortured in terrible ways and killed by Vandals trying to extract every bit of wealth from the churches. Women, too, were tortured, and priests were treated as beasts of burden, forced to carry the stolen wealth to the camps of the Vandals.[84] Priests sent frantic messages to their spiritual leader Augustine, wondering if they should flee before the violence. One said, "I do not see what good we can do for ourselves or for our people; it will be nothing but men being killed, women violated, churches burned, and ourselves fainting under torture when we are asked for what we have not." Augustine was firm in his response. People could run and hide, but priests and bishops who are responsible for their flock could not; they were to stay and minister to the sufferings of members of their congregations.[85] As we might expect, some priests fled, some stayed, and many died as the Vandals crossed North Africa in 429.

Geiseric's later policies show that these acts were not simply random violence but a concerted effort to transform the provinces into Arian strongholds. For example, the king decreed that only Arians could serve as officers in his administration.[86] North Africa had been suffering from religious warfare for over a century since Donatists had begun dying for their faith and Catholics had been claiming to fight a "just war" against dissenters. Now Geiseric was going to show that God was on the side of the Arians.

Finally, in early June 430, the Vandal hoard reached the borders of Numidia, and the Romans knew they had to draw the line here. Boniface with his troops met Geiseric and his seasoned army. After a battle, Boniface was defeated, and he retreated with his remaining troops to Augustine's city of Hippo Regius (modern Annaba in Algeria). There Geiseric established a siege of the city that lasted fourteen months.

It is somewhat ironic that Augustine's home was besieged by Arian Vandals and that Boniface, the general he both counted on and reprimanded, was trapped inside with him. They were joined by masses of refugees who had fled to safety inside the walls. The bishop who had written so confidently to refugees fleeing the Goths in 410 now had to confront the same feelings of loss and fear among his own flock. Yet, even as he was ill and declining, Augustine preached sermons to the displaced. Instead of preaching about the value of suffering or of a glorious abstract City of God, as he had in 410, he now, faced with the suffering of his congregation and his own imminent death, spoke of the love of life. "I know you want to keep on living. You do not want to die. . . . This is the deepest human feeling." Even so, he urged his followers to examine their innermost selves to be

sure that their love of life did not hide lurking attachments to this earthly world.[87] In one way, his approach was similar to the one he had taken in 410, when he had urged people not to try to understand God's plan in temporal disasters. Instead, he turned the crisis of his province into an opportunity for individual improvement; turn inward, leaving larger matters to God.

Augustine practiced what he preached and took to his bed to contemplate his own heart. He ordered four psalms of David (on penance) to be copied and hung on his walls within his sight. Then, he ordered that no one should enter his presence except his doctors to examine him and his servant to bring meals. He spent the rest of his days contemplating the psalms of penance and praying. Did he review his life and worry about mistakes and hidden sins? He must have, for as early as 427, he had been writing his *Retractions*, in which he reviewed his own works, explaining and revising them. In his prologue, he wrote, "The following words of Scripture, too, terrify me very much: 'In a multitude of words, you shall not avoid sin.'"[88] As he searched his own heart for the last time in this life, Augustine died, ten days after he took to his bed, on August 28, 430. He was buried in his beloved, besieged town of Hippo Regius.

A year later, in August 431, the Vandals lifted the siege and moved on to sack neighboring towns. Boniface and his army left the city to try to control the disaster in the province. However, the following year, the Vandals returned to Hippo and took it with hardly a struggle. They sacked and burned the city, but, remarkably, Augustine's library was untouched. Augustine's biographer, Possidius, compiled a list of his writings and said that he thought no one person in one lifetime would be able to read the bishop's prodigious output.[89] Augustine's legacy and influence was secured, even as Geiseric took over the city and made it his capital.

Back in Ravenna, Placidia followed the accounts of the horror in North Africa. Since Boniface had been unable to stop Geiseric in front of Hippo, Carthage—the economic engine of the western empire—was at risk. Sometime in early 431, Placidia wrote to her nephew Theodosius II in Constantinople for help. Theodosius knew the importance of the African provinces, and he immediately sent an army under the command of his general Aspar, and Placidia sent reinforcements from the western forces to join him. The combined armies confronted Geiseric, and the Romans were soundly defeated again, leading to a stalemate. Aspar stayed in command in Carthage, and he remained in good standing with Placidia and her nephew. He was raised to the consulship in 434.

With the advantage of hindsight, critics can say that Placidia (and Theodosius for that matter) should have worried more about Geiseric in North Africa, for

the West depended upon control of that province. However, in the middle of the fifth century, having barbarians in the provinces was business as usual. Tribes invaded, caused destruction, then settled down, contributing to the fabric of the empire. Even when Rome had been sacked in 410, the emperors had been in no hurry to conquer rampaging Goths; years passed, they settled down, and as Augustine had been quick to point out, the world didn't come to an end. So, for Placidia, time was on her side in North Africa. The one thing that might disrupt the world of the Theodosian imperial family was the rise of a usurper or a too-strong general. Placidia in 432 was most interested in securing the succession of her son Valentinian, who was then thirteen years old.

SECURING THE SUCCESSION OF VALENTINIAN

The death of Felix left Placidia with the problem of finding a general to support her dynasty until Valentinian came of age. Placidia had raised him with the expectation that he, unlike Honorius, could lead armies and become a soldier/emperor like his grandfather, Theodosius the Great. To achieve that, she needed to buy him some time. Her choices in 432 were Aetius and Boniface, the greatest generals of the West.

Aetius was particularly threatening to Placidia. In the first place, he had supported the usurper John against her, so she probably held lingering suspicions of his loyalty. More important, however, was his relationship with the Huns. They gave him loyalty, which gave him a power base outside her control and even outside the control of Theodosius, who was still paying the Huns an annual bribe to stay out of the East. Late in 430, however, the Huns were temporarily weakened in a great battle with another western tribe, the Burgundians, in which the defeated Huns lost some 10,000 warriors.[90] Aetius's outside support had been temporarily weakened. Now Placidia turned to Boniface.

In 432, Placidia recalled Boniface to Italy. North Africa was temporarily stabilized with the competent Aspar holding Geiseric at bay, and the empress was ready to reconcile with her long-standing supporter. She promoted him to patrician rank, making him Aetius's superior, and removed Aetius from his command. The battle lines were drawn between her two generals. Both Boniface and Aetius came back to Italy with large forces at their backs and battled near Rimini, about thirty miles (forty-eight kilometers) south of Ravenna. Boniface won the battle but was seriously wounded, perhaps by Aetius himself, with a specially prepared spear, longer than usual.[91] Though the sources do not say so, perhaps Aetius used the Huns' technique of dipping the tip of the spear in human feces to be sure

the wound would fester and become lethal. For whatever reason, Bonifice's physicians were unable to cure him, and he died of his wound three months later.

Placidia appointed Boniface's son-in-law Sebastian as his successor to lead the armies and protect the dynasty. Aetius fled, seeking supporters. He first went to Rome, then to the Dalmatian coast, and finally to the court of his old allies, the Huns. King Rugila of the Huns promised to help him return to power, and, in return, Aetius probably promised land and hostages as tokens of his friendship. The power struggle was not yet over.

Sebastian, with Placidia's help, turned to the Visigoths for support, but they were unwilling to risk a potential Hun invasion. Sebastian went east and then to North Africa, seeking allies, but Geiseric killed him. Aetius had won; Placidia was forced to make a virtue of necessity, and she appointed Aetius as patrician and master of the soldiers, perhaps in 434. It is probably not a coincidence that in the same year Theodosius II was forced to increase his tribute to the Huns to 700 pounds of gold a year. The fortunes of Aetius and the Huns rose together in these years.

Aetius consolidated his power in another, unusual way: he married Pelagia, wealthy widow of his enemy, Boniface. Pelagia brought with her wealth, barbarian troops, and perhaps the friendship of the empress. Placidia had always preferred to deal with women, whether the Empress Pulcheria or Felix's wife, Padusia. Now, her general Aetius had a wife with whom she could talk. Placidia's adolescent son, Valentinian, however, seethed at the power of a man he perceived of as his enemy, but he was still too young to do anything about it. Perhaps he had learned something of patience in adversity from his mother, for he bided his time to take revenge.

Aetius, once his power was secured, turned his attention to stabilizing the West. In 435, he supported a peace treaty with Geiseric, in which Placidia gave the Vandals lands from Hippo Regius west, saving the wealthy provinces of Proconsularis and parts of Numidia. This arrangement bought Aetius time to focus his attentions on Gaul, which he did with great success; his reputation as a fine general was well deserved. With the help of his Hunnic troops, he stopped a Visigothic expansion, subdued the Sueves in Spain, and brought peace to the border of the Rhine.[92] In 436, Aetius led the Huns as they took revenge on the Burgundians with a mass slaughter that has been immortalized in the epic *Niebelungenlied* and in Richard Wagner's operas based on the tale.

With her general effectively taking charge of the armies, Placidia turned her attention to preparing for Valentinian's coming of age. Unlike other regents in the past, Placidia seems to have had no desire to hold on to the regency and prevent

her son's ascendancy. Instead, as soon as legally possible, she moved him forward. She perceived (certainly correctly) that the key to his success lay in a close relationship with the eastern branch of the dynasty, so she proceeded to arrange the marriage between Valentinian and Theodosius's daughter Licinia Eudoxia that had been promised when they were small children.

Valentinian was to turn eighteen in 437, and Placidia did not waste any time preparing for his succession. In 436, she sent an eminent Roman senator, Volusian, to Constantinople to conduct the marital negotiations. Volusian was a good choice for the task because he was the uncle to the holy woman Melania, whom Placidia had known in her youth in Rome and who had fled Rome in 410. Though the elderly statesman remained a pagan, his family connections made Volusian a trusted emissary.

During the course of his negotiations, Volusian became seriously ill. As he was convalescing within the palace grounds, it happened that Melania arrived in Constantinople. She was surprised and pleased to see her uncle. When she was brought to Volusian, wearing her austere clothing (still the signal of status, whether secular or religious), the elderly statesman reminded everyone how "delicately she was brought up" and that her poverty was voluntary and thus, holy. On her part, Melania saw God's purpose in her meeting with her pagan uncle; she hoped he would convert to Christianity before his death. She was successful, and Volusian was baptized before his death in January 437.[93]

Melania stayed in Constantinople for over a month, and she enjoyed many conversations with Pulcheria and Eudocia, the two empresses or, as Melania's biographer called them "the Christ-loving imperial women." Melania also came to know the emperor Theodosius, and persuaded him to let Eudocia come and visit her in the Holy Land.[94] It seems there had been marital disharmony for some time, and Theodosius might have been happy to be left with his books and the company of his sister Pulcheria. Perhaps two empresses in a household were one too many. However, Eudocia had made a vow to go to Jerusalem only after she had seen her daughter, Eudoxia, married,[95] so her trip had to wait some months as she planned a wedding.

Valentinian left Ravenna in summer of 437 to go to the East and claim his bride. He took with him an entourage that included representatives from many of the noble families in the West. Placidia stayed behind, as did the general Aetius. Valentinian entered Constantinople on October 21, 437, and the elaborate wedding was celebrated a week later on October 29.[96] Valentinian was eighteen and Eudoxia was fifteen, both typical ages for marriage.

The couple exchanged valuable gifts, and the gold, jewels, and wealth of the

Figure 6.2. Commemorative gold coin for the wedding of Valentinian III and Eudoxia
(Wikimedia Commons)

imperial family was taken for granted, so these gifts were not mentioned. However, Theodosius gave Valentinian a beautifully bound copy of the newly completed law code, *Codex Theodosianus*, a project that was dear to the heart of Placidia. Theodosius handed Valentinian a copy "by his own divine hand," and the young emperor took it back to Rome to present it to the Senate in December of 438.[97] This law code had a profound effect on the slowly evolving law codes of the barbarian peoples of the West as they began to establish kingdoms of their own.

As was customary, the imperial mint in Constantinople struck a gold coin commemorating the great event. A very young Eudoxia is shown on the front, and on the reverse is Emperor Theodosius standing between the newly married pair (fig. 6.2). This marriage represented the future for both branches of the Theodosian dynasty, and the empresses Placidia, Pulcheria, and Eudocia prayed for a sturdy son to be born quickly to ensure the continuation of the dynasty.

After the wedding, the couple left Constantinople. At the beginning of his majority, Valentinian was establishing himself as something different from the previous emperors, from Arcadius to Honorius to Theodosius II. He did not intend to hide within walled palaces, pampered by eunuchs and courtiers. He and his bride began their married life by leaving Constantinople and traveling along the Roman roads skirting the Aegean Sea to arrive at Salonica. They moved into the palace and spent the winter there.

When the spring sailing season returned, probably in May of 438, the couple

sailed to Ravenna, docking in Classe and making a triumphal entry into the city. Placidia welcomed the couple joyously, particularly since Eudoxia was pregnant. In 438, Placidia had achieved what she had wanted. Her son was grown, married, and ready to rule; her daughter Honoria had the title of empress, and her daughter-in-law carried an heir.

CHAPTER 7

The Empress Mother and Her Children

438–455

Ravenna celebrated the birth of Placidia's first granddaughter late in 438 or early 439. During Eudoxia's pregnancy, Placidia probably worried about her young daughter-in-law and calmed her fears in her usual way with a church building project. Sometime in early 438, she commissioned a new mosaic for the Church of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem in Rome. This was an appropriate site for a blessing, since Eudoxia's mother was on her way to the Holy Land after the marriage, and Placidia and her family asked for blessings in this church that stood on the actual dirt from Jerusalem. The mosaic had the inscription: "May the kings of the earth and all peoples, leaders, and all judges of earth praise the name of the Lord. Valentinian, Placidia, and Honoria, Augusti, have paid their vow to the Holy Church Hierusalem."[1] The mosaic has been lost, as has the memory of the exact vow Placidia fulfilled, but if the contribution to the church's beauty was to ensure a safe delivery of a healthy child, as the date implies, it worked.

The infant was named after Eudoxia's mother, the empress Eudocia. The younger Eudocia was baptized at the Cathedral Ursiana in Ravenna by Peter Chrysologus, and we assume there was much joy in the royal household, though not as much as if a boy had been born to ensure the succession. On August 6, 439, to celebrate the birth, Valentinian's wife Eudoxia was given the rank of Augusta, and a third empress now ruled in Ravenna.

She arranged for a nursemaid and eunuchs to care for the new little princess, and as she grew, Placidia participated in her education, raising her granddaughter to be literate, educated, and religious. She probably hoped to recreate the pious household of Theodosius in Constantinople, in which brother and sister worked together in harmony, studying and praying for the improvement of the state and

the dynasty. Such plans for a harmonious household depended upon her children's agreement, however.

By now Honoria was twenty years old, and, along with the title of empress, she had a household of her own, probably within the royal compound in Ravenna. Placidia must have given her properties that brought in her own income, just as Placidia's father had done for her, for Honoria conducted her own affairs, and she had a steward to manage her financial matters.[2] It is surprising that Placidia did not arrange for Honoria to marry. She might have been following the model of Pulcheria, who made sure that neither she nor her sisters married, leaving Theodosius II with no legitimate rival for his throne. Just as Placidia disappeared from the sources when her brother Honorius was in his prime, Honoria does not appear in the accounts of her brother's ascendancy, like those describing his marriage or the birth of his first daughter. She would stay in the luxurious shadows of the court for another ten years until, like her mother before her, she would find a way to step forward.

Valentinian, too, established his independence from his mother, at least to some degree. He never openly defied her, and he continued many of her policies, from promulgating good laws to hating the general Aetius. Unlike Honorius, he did not spend his time in the palace in Ravenna; instead, he established a household and a presence in Rome.[3] It appears that Valentinian conducted independent correspondence with Theodosius II's court in Constantinople, for he had his own courtiers and messengers for this purpose.[4]

Later chroniclers accused Placidia of raising Valentinian "in an altogether effeminate manner,"[5] but there is no evidence that she dominated him during his majority. In fact, before 440, a treatise on the art of war was dedicated to Valentinian, which suggests that Placidia included warfare in his studies; she had educated him to lead.[6] Throughout the 440s, Valentinian created several patricians and masters of the soldiery in an attempt to divide Aetius's power, and in this he was probably continuing Placidia's strategy of weakening strong generals.[7] However, Valentinian had enough sovereignty that his mistakes, and there were plenty, were his own. As soon as he married, he moved about, making his own decisions, yet still consulting Placidia periodically.

Valentinian and Eudoxia went to Rome in 440. There, Eudoxia received a gift from her mother, who was traveling in the Holy Land. Just as parents today look for a suitable souvenir to send their children, Eudocia also sought the perfect gift for the daughter who was awash in jewels and riches. Like Constantine's mother searching for holy relics of the past, Eudocia found what she was told was a valu-

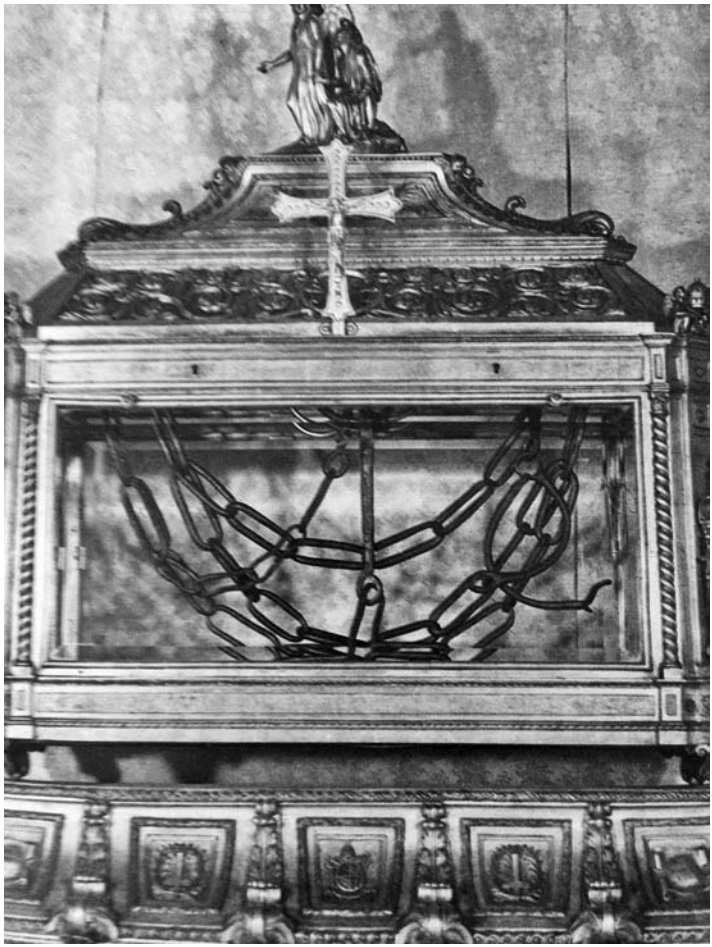


Figure 7.1. Chains of Saint Peter in Basilica Di San Pietro in Vincoli (Photo: Author, 2011)

able, holy remnant—the chains that bound Saint Peter when he was imprisoned in Jerusalem (fig. 7.1). It would indeed have been miraculous if they had been the actual chains that had been saved for some 400 years; in any case, Eudoxia received them with excitement. She installed the chains in an old basilica on the Esquiline Hill dedicated to the apostles, and she spent her own money to reconstruct the building and rededicate it to Saints Peter and Paul. This church was named the Basilica Eudoxiana (in Italian, Eudossiana) in honor of the empress, and it continues to receive many visitors.[8] The project surely endeared Eudoxia to her mother-in-law, who believed so strongly in building churches.

In August of 440, word came to Ravenna that Pope Sixtus III had died. Placidia and the court did not want another disputed election, and they also wanted a candidate agreeable to the imperial family. Valentinian, and perhaps Placidia, had worked with a deacon who had served in Sixtus's court, and had such faith in his skills that Valentinian had sent him that spring to Gaul to settle a dispute between Aetius and another general. While this deacon was in Gaul, he was unanimously elected to the papacy, probably with imperial support. He rushed back to Rome, and on September 29, 440, he took office as Pope Leo I. Leo's sermon on the occasion of his ordination was a model of humility, with thanks to his supporters and prayers for God's help during his tenure as bishop of Rome.[9] Leo, later called "the Great" and canonized, would go on to transform the role of the papacy.

Ambrose and Augustine had been the major theologians in the western part of the empire, and Leo took their place as he made his mark in establishing orthodox belief. Leo established another essential quality of the pope as bishop of Rome because he claimed authority over regions well outside Italy. For example, he addressed his first letter as pope to the bishop of Aquileia in Gaul, well outside his customary jurisdiction, reprimanding him for not fighting remnants of heresy in his land.[10] Throughout his career, as we will see, Leo continued this universal involvement, claiming an authority beyond that of previous bishops of Rome. In a famous law issued on July 8, 445, Valentinian recognized the pope's supreme jurisdiction over the churches of the West.[11] While it is likely that Valentinian, with the support of his mother, was simply endorsing a useful resolution of a current problem (an argument between Pope Leo and the Bishop of Arles), the long-standing effect of this law was tremendous. The bishop of Rome—the Pope—began to claim supremacy in the West and to think of himself as primary over the eastern patriarchs. For the rest of her life, Placidia worked closely with Leo, enhancing his authority.

Through the years of Valentinian's childhood and into his majority, Placidia's reputation for holiness had spread. Like Melania and the noble women in the Christian households in the previous generation, Placidia had a reputation for good works and piety that spread into Gaul and beyond, forwarded in part by a visit of a bishop from Gaul, named Germanus, who traveled to Ravenna in about 445, performing miracles along the way. Germanus's biographer wrote an account of the saint's visit to Placidia, which gives us a glimpse of life in Ravenna from a point of view different from the standard imperial sources.[12]

With a few companions, Germanus entered Italy on his mule, crossing the Alps through the high Pass of Montgenèvre and riding into Milan. Then he trav-

eled slowly through the Po Valley, gathering a reputation for curing illnesses and exorcising the demons that regularly seemed to inhabit people. His reputation grew, and rumors of his miracles preceded him to Ravenna, where crowds awaited his arrival. Bishop Peter Chrysologus and Placidia "vied with one another in the reception that they gave to the revered Bishop." Valentinian was residing in Rome during this time, so he played no role in receiving Germanus. This incident also reveals the frequently separate lives of Placidia and her son.

Placidia sent Germanus a generous gift to welcome him—a huge silver platter filled with many kinds of delicious food, all vegetarian, since it was the custom of many holy men and women to abstain from meat. Germanus distributed the food to his followers and sent back a gift appropriate to a man who embraced poverty, a wooden platter with a barley loaf on it. Placidia treasured the gifts since they had come from the holy man. By now, it had been almost sixty years since Ambrose first shocked Milan and the Christian world by translating (that is, moving) the relics of saints to his church, and by this time holy relics were treasured commodities. Every church wanted them, and every pious Christian was on the lookout for them. Thus, a platter and loaf from an acknowledged miracle-working holy man were treasures indeed, and Placidia made sure they looked like it; she had the wooden plate set in gold. A glittering frame was the visible expression of the holiness that was supposed to reside in a modest item from a holy person. This theory led to the spectacular jeweled and golden reliquaries that dominated the churches of the medieval world.

Germanus grew ill while he was in Ravenna, and he knew he was going to die. Placidia "laid aside the haughtiness of royalty and went visiting the pauper." She promised to grant him any wish, but all he wanted was to have his body returned to Gaul to be buried there. She agreed, though unwillingly, since she was hoping to keep his holy body in Ravenna. A week after he became ill, he died, and Placidia and Bishop Peter each wanted to claim his few possessions as relics. Placidia kept a small reliquary of his, and the bishop took his cloak and a hair shirt that Germanus had worn to torture his body as a means to holiness. The empress's eunuch had the remains embalmed in spices, and Germanus's body was sent in state for the long journey back to Auxerre, in Gaul, where he was buried.

Germanus's visit to Ravenna served to enhance the religious reputations of the bishop and the empress. The display of his relics reminded people of the visit, and it also made Ravenna increasingly a place for visitors. Placidia probably received other travelers whose visits left no mark, but in general the empress's reputation continued to grow.

In about 442, Valentinian and Eudoxia were back in Ravenna for the birth

of Eudoxia's second child. As the midwives and the household women gathered for the birth, hopes for a son must have been high. However, Eudoxia brought forth another daughter. She was baptized and named Placidia, which must have brought her grandmother much joy. The court poet, Merobaudes, who like Claudian before him, wrote songs and panegyrics for the imperial family and their general Aetius, wrote two songs on the occasion of little Placidia's baptism. The poet praised the continuity of the Theodosian line, "The court flourishes after obtaining its master's beautiful offspring."[13] In this praise, Merobaudes was serving both his masters, for the lack of a son allowed Aetius to consider this little girl as a suitable bride for his own son. Just like the generals Stilicho and Constantius before him, Aetius hoped to marry into the imperial family.

Placidia was Eudoxia's last child, and there is no record of whether she joined her husband in his many trips to Rome or whether she stayed in the household of Ravenna, imitating the pious empresses Pulcheria and Placidia. That there was no male heir in either the West or the East meant that the succession depended on the Theodosian women. Pulcheria was too old to bear a child, so the future lay with Honoria, or the little girls, Eudocia and Placidia, and Valentinian knew their value as pawns to the succession.

GEISERIC IN NORTH AFRICA AND EUDOCIA THE YOUNGER

In October 439, Geiseric broke the treaty that had been in place for over four years. He and his troops moved into the richer provinces of North Africa, and moved toward Carthage itself. Why did Geiseric renounce the treaty at this time? Probably because he could. Aetius had been fighting Visigoths for some years and had only delivered a significant victory against them at Snake Mountain in the early part of 439,[14] and this victory came because he had pulled troops from North Africa, weakening Carthage's defenses.

In October, Geiseric must have also found someone within Carthage willing to betray the city, just as Alaric had found someone to open Rome's gates in 410. Geiseric had not been able to take Hippo Regius by siege, and Carthage's walls were even more formidable. The sources don't indicate a long siege, so someone must have let Geiseric and his troops in. This time the sack of the city was not controlled, as it had been in Rome. The bishop of Carthage, Quodvultdeus, was an eyewitness to the destruction, and his description captured the ruthlessness of the Vandals. He wrote that the streets were filled with the dead, pregnant women were slaughtered, and even babies were torn from their nurses and thrown on the street to die. Men and women were enslaved with no regard for rank,[15] a rever-

sal of hierarchy shocking to the upper-class bishop. Once the violence had subsided, Geiseric published a decree requiring all residents to bring their remaining wealth to him, including gold, silver, gems, and costly fabrics.[16]

The Vandals also destroyed some of the great buildings in Carthage, burning the theaters and even many church buildings, including the famous basilica of the third-century martyrs Perpetua and Felicity. They continued their attack on the Catholic Church, torturing bishops and sending others into exile. Bishop Quodvultdeus himself ended up in Naples.[17] Many of the churches were given over to Arian worship, and those residents of Carthage who wanted to work in the new administration had to convert to Arianism and be rebaptized into the Vandals' church. In these ways, Geiseric continued his policy of a complete victory, a replacement of the old order with the new. Even as Geiseric consolidated his rule, he prepared for the coming spring season of war, for he knew Aetius would be arming his troops to come to North Africa to retake the province.

The loss of North Africa was a devastating blow to Valentinian's reign. He spent the years 440 and 441 in Ravenna, and he consulted with Placidia and all their advisors as they prepared a strategy. The emperor began to issue laws to try to confront this disaster. The first problem was the food supply to Rome, and in March Valentinian issued a law giving a special license to eastern traders in Rome to guarantee food supplies to the city. The next problem was the defense of Italy itself; the Vandals had ships and had demonstrated their skill in using them. The emperor ordered Rome's walls repaired and strengthened, and he tried to increase the numbers of men at arms. He issued conscription laws looking for new recruits and laws against harboring deserters.[18] Finally, by June, Valentinian issued a law urging people to arm themselves "because it is not sufficiently certain, under summertime opportunities for navigation, to what shore the ships of the enemy can come."[19]

The court in Ravenna sent a plea to Constantinople for additional forces and received a positive response; Theodosius and Pulcheria knew the value of North Africa and did not want Geiseric's navy threatening their own shipping. In the law of June 440 warning people to arm themselves, Valentinian included a reassuring addendum: "the army of the most invincible Emperor Theodosius, our Father, will soon approach and . . . We trust that the Most Excellent Patrician Aetius will soon be here with a large force."[20]

Valentinian and Placidia readily put aside their dislike for Aetius during this time of crisis. In 440, they even erected a statue of the general in Rome behind the Senate House. On the statue's base, the emperor ordered that all the general's titles, honors, and victories in war be listed. This was a rare honor in an age

Figure 7.2. Placidia's inscription on mosaic. Saint Paul's Outside the Walls, Rome.
(Photo: © Adrian Fletcher, paradoxplace.com)

when emperors received all the honors for their general's successes. Rome needed Aetius to stand against Geiseric, so they were lavish in their expression of their appreciation.

In the summer of 440, Romans were frightened by a bad omen. The church of Saint Paul Outside the Walls was struck by lightning and damaged. Once again, Placidia rallied to the cause and used her money to rebuild the church. In recognition of her contribution, she commissioned a mosaic, which still graces the church (fig. 7.2). It reads, "The pious mind of Placidia rejoices that the whole beauty of her father's work [the original church] is resplendent through the zeal of Pontiff Leo." This was the church that Alaric preserved as a sanctuary when he sacked the city in 410, and Placidia probably had some fondness for it. The prayers

of Placidia and Pope Leo and this church of Saint Paul were designed to persuade God to help with a new threat to Rome, the Vandals.

Late in 440, Aetius's army began to assemble in Sicily for the crossing to North Africa. Troops arrived from Gaul and Italy, and Theodosius had also been generous in sending troops from the East. Some 1,100 ships landed in Sicily, prepared to carry tens of thousands of men with horses and supplies across the approximately 100 miles (about 160 kilometers) to the North African coast. The substantial eastern forces were led by five commanders, and through the winter of 441 the formidable Roman organization prepared to supply the army. In March 441, all was ready for the coming of the sailing season. Shockingly, however, the armada never sailed, and all troops returned to their respective bases.[21] I will return to the question of why the invasion was cancelled, but in 441, the court in Ravenna sent out messages to Geiseric to negotiate a peace.

In 442, the court agreed to a peace treaty with Geiseric to replace the one they had signed in 435. Now Geiseric was recognized as a client king of Rome, with the title "allied king and friend," and he was given control of the prosperous regions of North Africa, the provinces of Proconsularis (with its capital, the wealthy city of Carthage), Byzacena, and part of Numidia. (See the map in chapter 6.) In return, Geiseric gave the empire back the western provinces he had taken in 435 and agreed to pay an annual tribute of grain, ensuring Rome's food supply.[22]

The terms of the treaty were straightforward, but a significant feature of the agreement lay in how it was to be guaranteed. In dealing with the tribes, Rome had long ago discovered that everything was personal. Ravenna demanded a hostage, and they accepted Geiseric's son Huneric to live in the court at Ravenna. He was more than the usual hostage, however, because he was promised as bridegroom to Valentinian's eldest daughter, Eudocia. This move demonstrates how desperately Ravenna needed peace with Geiseric. The court was willing to marry the girl to an Arian. It was not without precedent, after all. Placidia had married Athaulf so many years earlier, and she and her son considered the family alliance to be worth it. Of course, Eudocia was only three years old, so they had a decade or so before the marriage would be completed; there was lots of time. Meanwhile, Huneric would come to know the court at Ravenna.

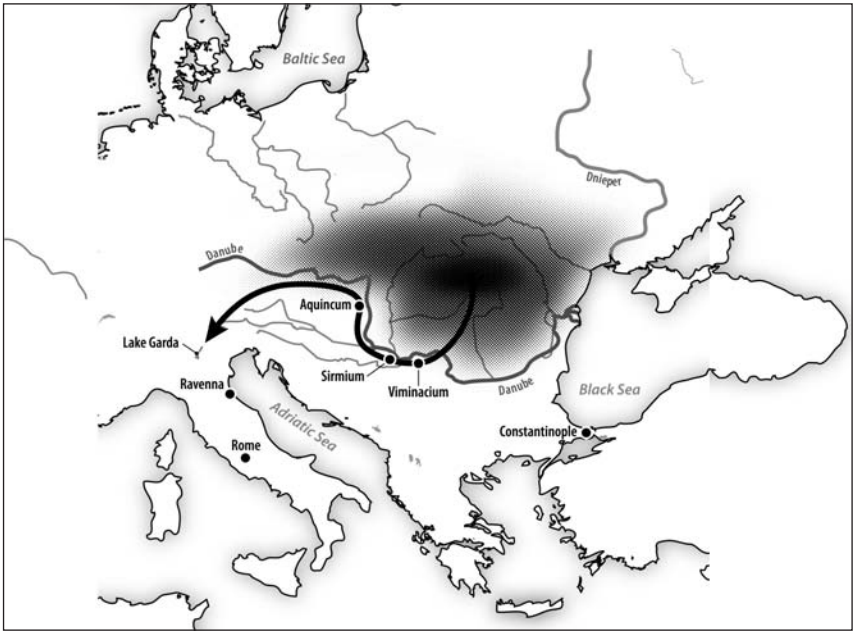
Huneric's betrothal to Eudocia was in the best tradition of sealing political matters with family ties, but it also pointed up the frequent hazards of such alliances for the women involved. Within Roman families, wives were divorced and new alliances formed with some ease as political winds shifted; among the barbarians, breaking ties was more difficult. Huneric had been betrothed (or married) before to create an alliance between Geiseric and the Visigoths. However,

in order to be available to marry into the imperial family of the Theodosians, which was a definite improvement, Huneric had to renounce the Visigothic princess. Geiseric accused the girl of trying to poison him and cut off her nose, cut her ears, and sent her home to her father.[23] The treatment of the girl ensured that the Visigoths remained implacable enemies of the Vandals, a situation that suited Aetius, who did not want a union between two of his strongest enemies. For a time, then, there was peace between the Vandals and the Romans, and, once again, reminiscent of Placidia's marriage to Athaulf, a peace with barbarians was made through a daughter of the House of Theodosius.

As was so often the case in Placidia's household, the betrothal was celebrated by the commissioning of a mosaic to depict the occasion in the best possible light. The image is lost, but the poet Merobaudes wrote a short poem describing the magnificent mosaic: "The Emperor himself in full splendor occupies with his wife the center of the ceiling, as if they were the bright stars of the heavens on high; he is the salvation of the land, and worthy of veneration. In the presence of our protector a new exile suddenly weeps for his lost power. Victory has restored the world to the one who has received it from nature, and an illustrious court has furnished a bride from afar."[24]

The mosaic and the poet's accompanying account, portraying a weeping Huneric in Valentinian's court, is a perfect bit of propaganda, putting the best spin on the catastrophic loss of Africa. We can easily imagine a mosaic in Carthage with a weeping Valentinian handing over his daughter to the victorious Geiseric; however, those who pay the artist can shape the account, and Placidia was a master at mosaic propaganda. Regardless of the interpretation of the event, the deed was done. North Africa belonged to the Vandals, and little Eudocia would have a Vandal for her husband.

The question remains: Why didn't Valentinian take the military option and sail with his huge fleet to Carthage? Merobaudes, in a panegyric to General Aetius, gives a hint of the problem that stopped the advance on Africa. He writes of a goddess of war calling forth "Scythian quivers" in a great new battle for the general.[25] Scythian was the classic term for horsemen, and the only horsemen with quivers full of arrows that could threaten the empire in 441 were the Huns. Indeed, this fierce tribe was on the move again, and neither the eastern nor western parts of the empire could afford to send their forces to North Africa; they were needed at home to guard against enemies from the north.



Hunnic Empire, 450
(Art by Katina Daanen)

ATTILA, THE "SCOURGE OF GOD," AND HONORIA

Aetius and Theodosius had made a treaty with the Hunnic king Rugila before 433, and the general had hoped that his good relations with the Huns might allow him to keep using their soldiers in his army and be safe from the Hunnic forces. Sometime in about 434, however, Rugila died. He was succeeded by his nephews, Bleda and Attila, who ruled jointly. In 445, Attila arranged for his brother to be killed, and then he ruled alone. Attila's was the name that struck fear into the hearts of Romans and barbarians alike.

Contemporary chroniclers offer a description of this fearsome man, saying he was short, with a broad chest and a large head. His eyes were small and his beard thin and sprinkled with gray. He had a flat nose and a dark complexion. He walked in a haughty manner but always observed everything around him. As the chronicler wrote, "the power of his proud spirit appeared in the movement of his body."[26] Attila encouraged a story that foretold his greatness: A herdsman found one of his heifers limping with blood on its foot. As the man tried to find the cause of this injury, he dug up a sword, and took it to Attila. The king identified

it as the "sword of Mars," which guaranteed him supremacy in all wars.[27] Thus began his reign of terror.

In 441, Attila and Bleda could not resist turning to the west. They knew the Roman armies were preparing to attack the Vandals in North Africa and were engaged in holding the Persians at bay in the East. Roman forces in the Balkans had been severely weakened by sending so many troops to Sicily, and the Huns took advantage of the gaps. Attila used two excuses for breaking the truce with Rome: (1) the gold payments were in arrears, and (2) the Romans had promised to send back all "deserters" from the Hunnic ranks. By *deserter,* Attila meant anyone who did not feel loyal to the new kings (Attila and Bleda) and who had come into the Roman Empire and served in its armies. The Huns repeatedly insisted that the disloyal had to be returned to be killed; Attila and Bleda were going to make sure their armies were not weakened by anyone competing for their soldiers. With these excuses in hand, the Huns moved south.

The entryway into the Balkans proper along the Morava River, a branch of the Danube, was defended by a series of fortified cities. Even if these cities were undermanned, Attila and Bleda could not bypass them, for that would leave their flank exposed. In the past, Goths and other barbarians had not had the technology to besiege towns; now the situation had changed. A witness said that Hunnic siege engines were brought up to the wall and together fired a "cloud" of many missiles that drove the defenders from the walls. Then the Huns brought up a battering ram: a "beam is suspended by slack chains from timbers which incline together, and it is provided with a sharp metal point and screens . . . for the safety of those working it." The rams broke into the walls, and scaling ladders allowed the Huns to finish the job by going over the wall.[28] First the fort at Viminacium fell, then the fortified city of Naissus. With Greece and Constantinople open to attack by the Hunnic armies, it is no wonder Geiseric the Vandal was able to negotiate such favorable terms and relax in his new capital of Carthage. Now the Romans had to renegotiate their treaty with the Huns.

In some ways, the Huns had not made many changes to the tactics that had made them a terrifying force for decades. They were still master archers with their compound recurve bows. They still treasured their small, hardy horses and conducted their business mounted. They were so adamant about maintaining their dignity on horseback that Romans who wished to negotiate with the Huns were forced to mount horses so that they did not have to speak from the ground while looking up at the mounted Huns.[29] Despite their having kept some of their traditions, however, they had also changed. The fall of the fortified cities in the Balkans provided the most dramatic evidence that the Huns of the 440s were dif-

ferent from those late fourth-century nomads that chroniclers and Romans alike had found so primitive. Now, not only had the Huns mastered the intricacies and technology of siege warfare, but they had a settled heartland and fixed forts and houses.

In the fifth century, Priscus, an ambassador from Theodosius's court, traveled into the Hunnic territory to visit Attila, and his eyewitness account shows how the nomadic Huns had been transformed.[30] Priscus and his group traveled through fixed villages, where they rested at night. Then they approached "Attila's palace," which was within a fortified enclosure. Priscus attended a banquet in the court that had all the trimmings of a wealthy Roman meal. There were chairs, couches, and tables, and people were arranged according to a complicated hierarchy. Each person had a "cup-bearer," a slave to pour wine into golden and silver goblets as toasts were exchanged. The food, too, was abundant and served on silver plates.

The women of the Huns also had improved their lives since the years they spent sewing in the backs of wagons. The Hunnic kings were polygamous, and Priscus visited one of Attila's wives and brought her gifts. She lived in an enclosure with several buildings, "some of carved boards beautifully fitted together." She was reclining on a soft couch, and the floors were covered with carpets. Many servants and maidens sat with her as they embroidered linen cloth, weaving in small glass beads. Each wife lived in similar comfort in her own home.

Beyond siege warfare, the greatest skill the Huns had acquired while living close to the Roman Empire was diplomacy. They had become far more sophisticated over the years; a wagon full of gold would no longer keep them satisfied. Priscus's diplomatic mission was only one of many, as Attila escalated his demands, not only increasing the gold he wanted but requiring the return of any Huns who ran from his rule to serve in Rome's armies. Furthermore, he insisted on a buffer zone around the Danube to ensure the safety of the new Hunnic homelands. The diplomacy became so complex that Attila even unraveled an assassination plot against the leader of the Huns that Theodosius's eunuch advisor had attempted.[31]

The Huns had changed while living near the empire, and the Romans, too, had changed their attitude toward the Huns. People no longer saw them as "half animal," as Ammianus had described them, and, since everyone loves a winner, as the Huns became more successful, some people began to imitate them. Some even bound their children's skulls to shape them in an elongated form, copying the Hunnic style.[32] Two centuries later, in recollection of Hunnic success, followers of chariot teams (the equivalent of modern soccer hooligans) dressed as Huns, shaving their hair in the front and wearing it long in the back as they terrorized

passersby, and it is likely that similar incidents took place in the late fifth century. Still, everyone recognized that the Huns were a threat to the peace of the empire.

Attila's victories brought a theological problem to the Theodosian dynasty, who still claimed to rule because God was on their side. Attila and his Huns were pagans, so how could God allow them to be victorious? A priest in Gaul named Salvian who watched the Hunnic devastation responded to this question in a tract entitled *A Report on the Governance of God*, written sometime between 439 and 450. Salvian wrote to draw attention to the corruption and injustice in the Roman government. In this work, he repeatedly complains about high taxes, the loss of North Africa, and the reduced income from the provinces that were shared by barbarian tribes. Roman tax collectors were under pressure to bring in more money to fund the lavish court and the expensive wars. The priest further explains that the rich find ways to avoid the new taxes, so the burden falls heavily on the backs of the poor. He concludes that this treatment angers God: "Do we think we are unworthy of the punishment of divine severity when we thus constantly punish the poor?" He continues his proof by claiming that Romans rush to live in regions governed by barbarians in order to avoid the tax burden.[33]

Salvian was no Augustine, explaining disasters in a cosmic way to battle a paganism that still threatened Christian belief. Instead, the priest in Gaul offered a new explanation for disasters; this explanation would last millennia (and even until today in some circles). He assumed that everyone was Christian, so belief in God wasn't at issue. Instead, he urged people to consider why God was punishing them and to correct their behavior. This was not a God focused in a loving way on the "City of God" that lay entangled in a fallen world. Instead, this was a God moved to anger by human actions, so people should watch themselves carefully. Theology was slowly shifting as disasters piled up.

The traveler to Attila's court, Priscus, articulated a sentiment similar to Salvian's critique of Roman society when he related an incident that occurred in the Hunnic territory. Priscus encountered a Greek dressed as a Hun and speaking the Hunnic language. Priscus asked him why he lived with the Huns instead of returning to civilization. The Greek replied that there was actually more justice in the Hunnic camp, for in Rome, only the wealthy could pay the necessary bribes to win in court: "A transgressor who belongs to the wealthy classes is not punished for his injustice," and the poor man always loses.[34]

The conclusion raised by these speculations was that Attila was sent by God to punish corrupt Romans. Attila was called the "scourge of God," a tool that God used to whip his people back into a life of virtue, in which they cared for justice and the poor. Salvian assured Christians that God still had mercy, even within

this punishment. For example, he pointed out that Gaul wasn't destroyed in one blow but slowly so that, while one part was "struck down," other sections could amend their behavior through the example of the destruction.[35] Others noted examples of God's continued favor toward the Christians. For example, Gregory the bishop of Tours told how even while the Huns were using their battering rams against the walls of Orleans, the city's pious bishop prayed for help. After his repeated prayers, the faithful noticed a cloud of dust rising on the horizon; it was Aetius with his army galloping to their rescue.[36] Christians had to have faith that God would sometimes stay the hand of his own scourge.

It seemed that God was piling on disasters to correct the faithful, for, in 447, just as the Huns were preparing to come south to attack Constantinople, a great earthquake struck the city and destroyed the walls that represented its only security against Attila's armies. Even as the emperor and the churches prayed, the praetorian prefect of the city got organized. He mobilized the two chariot factions, the Blues and the Greens, and put them to work clearing the moats of rubble and repairing the walls and the towers. As the Huns moved south, the two teams competed to see which could build fastest, and it worked. By March, the walls were repaired, and the prefect erected a plaque (it still stands), proudly announcing the speed of the reconstruction and claiming that "Athena could hardly have built such a secure citadel in so short a time."[37]

The great walls held. Attila had siege engines, but these walls were thick enough to last another thousand years, until cannons brought them down. In the meantime, Attila accepted a peace treaty with Theodosius that gave him 2,100 pounds of gold a year and a promise to evacuate a large buffer zone around the Danube to keep the Huns' homeland safe. No one really thought this agreement would end Attila's threat, and negotiations continued about the remaining issues of expatriate Huns and land. The last real question for Attila was: In what direction should he expand? He could go west into Gaul and Italy, or he could go east and threaten the Persian Empire. In 449, Aetius sent a representative to Attila to encourage him to go east, but the situation changed when Placidia's daughter Honoria got involved.

In 449, Honoria was over thirty years old. She had money, estates, the title of empress, but she was not satisfied. She was no Pulcheria, willing to devote herself to chastity and prayer to support her imperial brother. Placidia tried to avoid the sibling rivalry and anger she had experienced when she was a girl by making sure Honoria received all the honors her brother had, but the one thing she could not give her was power. The problem was compounded when Valentinian did not produce an heir; now the future of the Theodosian dynasty lay through the

wombs of the women of the family. This situation offered Honoria an opportunity, and it made her a threat to Valentinian and his two daughters. Everybody knew that Placidia had come to power when her brother the emperor had not produced an heir. If Honoria were going to act, at her age, it had to be soon.

Honoria's first fall from chastity came in about 449, when she began an affair with Eugenius, the steward who conducted her business.[38] The sources say that the relationship was "discovered" and that Eugenius immediately was put to death so that there would be no question of his right to the throne. Some authors have suggested that the affair was discovered because Honoria became pregnant by Eugenius,[39] but there is no evidence for a pregnancy. Either there was none, or Honoria aborted the fetus early. There were many recipes for abortifacients, and Roman physicians wrote about the techniques used by midwives to help women abort.[40] The problem was not a baby but what to do about Honoria.

The law gave Valentinian the right to execute Honoria for adultery, but Placidia intervened, and she and her son reached a compromise. Honoria was stripped of her title of empress and betrothed to a wealthy, high-ranking senator, Flavius Bassus Herculanus, whom Valentinian must have trusted not to strive for the throne. Honoria did not want to marry him, and she lacked the patience of her mother, who had made the best of her forced marriage to Constantius. Instead, Honoria decided to model her actions on her mother's bolder move: she would marry a barbarian who could join with her imperial blood and seize power.

Her choices were limited at this point. The Vandal heir was already betrothed to her niece. The most powerful barbarian in 449 was Attila. Honoria didn't care that he was a polygamous pagan; presumably, she believed she could sort those details out later. In her rage at her brother, she set a plan in motion that a chronicler claimed brought "disastrous and terrible trouble." She trusted her faithful eunuch Hyacinthus to take a message to Attila. She sent him money, "that he might avenge her marriage," and she sent him her ring, "pledging herself to the barbarian."[41]

There is no record of the message Honoria sent along with these tokens, but it was probably consistent with Attila's response. He sent a message claiming her as his bride and demanded that half of the western empire be surrendered to her.[42] This is probably what Honoria wanted. She and Attila expected to rule in Gaul, where she could set up an independent court far from Italy and far from her brother. Did she remember her mother's fond stories of her time in Barcelona with Athaulf? Perhaps she did, but with this message she had crossed her own Rubicon of treason.

Attila sent the message to Theodosius and Valentinian, and Theodosius im-

mediately sent a message to Valentinian telling him to accept the proposal and send Honoria to Attila's camp. Theodosius must have imagined that she would be less trouble far away in the Hunnic camp without her resources. Valentinian—and Placidia—refused. Valentinian arrested the eunuch Hyacinthus and had him tortured horribly until he told the whole story. Then Valentinian had him beheaded. He was ready to execute Honoria, too, but Placidia "persistently asked for her," so he granted Honoria "to his mother as a boon." Honoria presumably went to her new husband's household, where she disappears from the record. She outlived her mother, but the chronicler closes his account of this incident rather ominously, writing that Honoria "was freed from her danger at this time,"[43] implying that a threat to Honoria would later appear.

Honoria's attempt to recreate her mother's success in marrying a barbarian demonstrates once again what historians know all too well: History may repeat itself, but it never does so in quite the same way. Honoria learned this lesson the hard way. Meanwhile, Attila prepared to invade the West to claim his bride, and Aetius gathered his armies to withstand him. As much as it seems that this new threat to the West would have consumed all the court's attention, it wasn't so. Generals and armies prepared themselves as they had done for centuries, and the empress Placidia had gone to Rome to intercede for Honoria. She took up residence in the palace there and engaged in her final causes.

PLACIDIA'S LAST DAYS

Placidia, along with Valentinian, his wife, and their two daughters, arrived in Rome on February 21, 450. The next day was the Feast of Peter's Chair, and the family went to Saint Peter's basilica on Vatican Hill for the service. We learn of this event from a letter written by Placidia and preserved in Pope Leo's correspondence. The empress writes that after the service the pope approached her and "uttered laments over the Catholic Faith" and with "tears and moans" asked for her help.[44]

The problem Leo posed had to do again with the question of the incarnation of Christ. The Council of Ephesus in 431 had determined that Mary was indeed the "Mother of God" and that the incarnation took place in her womb. By 448, the controversy had been reopened. A popular monk in Constantinople, named Eutyches (a good friend of the powerful eunuch Chrysaphius) claimed that after the incarnation, Christ had only one nature, for his divinity was so powerful that it overwhelmed his humanity. Eutyches said that Christ was of one substance with God but that he was not of one substance with us. This understanding was called Monophysitism, meaning of one nature. That meant that the flesh that

Christ had was not derived from Mary but from some other heavenly source.[45] The patriarch of Constantinople, Flavian, opposed Eutyches' understanding of the incarnation and condemned him.

Eutyches did not accept the condemnation and wrote to bishops in Rome, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Ravenna, looking for help. At first, Pope Leo seems to have misunderstood the controversy (it is easy to miss the subtleties in Eutyches' formulation) and wrote the problem off to the monk's "ignorance and madness."[46] Peter Chrysologus from Ravenna responded with equally confused dismay. He first suggested that a little less philosophical speculation would help: "Christ's origin, which the divine Law calls indescribable, is still bandied about in rash disputation!" He declines to comment on the substance of the argument, pleading ignorance about the details, but urges Eutyches to listen to the pope in Rome and do what he says.[47] Thus, the theological ball was back in Leo's court.

Leo wrote a letter to Bishop Flavian in Constantinople to solve the problem. This famous letter is called the *Tome* of Leo and sets out what would become the orthodox position on the nature of Christ's incarnation. Leo claimed that Christ fully maintained both his humanity and his divinity. Jesus's flesh was the very flesh of the Virgin Mary, and his soul was that of a human being. At the same time, he was fully God. Leo pointed out the theological problem of Eutyches's position, for if the resurrected Christ had been simply God all along, what did that offer for us? No, it was as a fully human being that Christ was resurrected so that our fully human selves might "also overcome . . . death."[48] Leo sent his letter to Flavian in June 449, certain that it would end the controversy. He was wrong.

Emperor Theodosius had called another council in the Virgin Mary's city of Ephesus to convene on August 1, 449, in order to resolve the differences between Eutyches and Flavian. Pope Leo had been invited, but he did not attend; he sent his *Tome* to be read instead. However, Leo's letter was never read. One of the representatives in this city that was so fond of Mary claimed mildly: "Two natures before the union, one afterwards. Is this not what we all believe?" But then the crowd gathering on the marble streets took over, shouting down Flavian and anyone who opposed Eutyches's position: "Cut in pieces the man who divides Christ. . . . Anathema to him who says two natures after the incarnation." Bishop Flavian was condemned, assaulted, and died as a result of his injuries.[49] Leo heard the conclusion of this council, which he called the "robber synod," and threw himself in tears at Placidia's feet to ask her and the family to intervene with Emperor Theodosius and Pulcheria.

The court wrote a flurry of letters to the East. Placidia wrote to Theodosius and Pulcheria; Eudoxia wrote to her father, the emperor, and Theodosius re-

sponded to both. Valentinian, too, wrote to his coemperor.[50] Placidia's family all called for Theodosius to call a new synod to reconsider the council's findings, and Theodosius's reply was a stern reprimand, probably composed by the eunuch Chrysaphius, saying that the council at Ephesus had come to the correct conclusion and there was no reason to overturn it.[51] Pulcheria was living apart from the palace after a dispute with her brother, so she could not intervene to smooth the waters.

Fate—or God—intervened to resolve the family dispute. On July 26, 450, Theodosius fell from his horse, injuring his spine. Two days later he was dead. Pulcheria immediately took power. She knew she could not rule alone, and, at fifty-one years of age, she would not produce an heir for the Theodosian dynasty. However, she chose a Roman general, Marcian, to be her husband, and on November 25, 450, she crowned him emperor. As a condition of the marriage, Marcian promised to respect Pulcheria's vow of virginity. He took over the armies and left theology to Pulcheria.

Pulcheria immediately moved to overthrow the "robber synod" of Ephesus, and in 451, a new council was called at Chalcedon, a city near Constantinople. (Today it is a suburb of Istanbul.) Here, away from Ephesus, the question of the incarnation was resolved, and Leo's *Tome* was adopted. From 451 on, orthodox churches of the East and the West celebrated on the Nativity of Christ, and what they celebrated was that both natures of Christ—human and divine—"are united without change, without division and without confusion."[52] The mystery of how both natures were united and preserved remained just that—a mystery.

As with all compromises, there were people left angered by the decision at Chalcedon. Just as Nestorian Christians left the empire to keep from changing their understanding of the incarnation, Monophysite Christians in Egypt clung tenaciously to their view. From 451 on, Alexandria had two patriarchs, one Monophysite and one Chalcedonian, and the Monophysite church continues today as the Coptic Church in Egypt, with its own pope. In Alexandria on the day of the Nativity, Coptic Christians celebrate with wonder the presence of God in the manger.

Placidia did not live to see the full resolution of this controversy, but it was addressed in accordance with the wishes she expressed in her letters. Pope Leo's stand was upheld, and his status as a leader of the church over the patriarchs was enhanced. Placidia had been drawn into this controversy by Pope Leo's tears, but she had come to Rome with other agendas. She wanted to save her daughter Honoria and see her safely married, which she accomplished quickly. Then she turned to thoughts of her own mortality.

In 450, Placidia was sixty-two years old. The other members of her family had

died younger than this, so she recognized that she was at the end of her days. Did she suffer from dropsy, the kind of congestive heart failure or poor kidneys that had taken her father and brother? There are no records of this. However, as with so many of us who find we have much less future than past, she began to look backward.

Her letter to Theodosius, written in 450, offers a glimpse of how she defined her life. She wrote that her letter came from "Galla Placidia, most pious and prosperous, perpetual Augusta and mother."[53] Those words perfectly reflect her values and her accomplishments. First and foremost, she was religious, and, with her prayers and her endowments to churches, she believed she kept God on the side of Rome and her dynasty. She was also consciously proud of her status; hers was not a religious life devoted to poverty. Instead, she took pride in her wealth and in her imperial title. She was "perpetual" Augusta, and she would take her title with her into the next life. She also proudly listed her role as mother, and by 450, she had accomplished her maternal goals. In spite of her daughter's reckless gamble for power with Attila the Hun, she was well and safely married. Her son was secure on the throne and well married. Even though Valentinian had produced no son, at least Placidia could look to her granddaughters to carry on the Theodosian line.

While Placidia was protective and proud of her two children, here in the twilight of her years she looked backward and remembered her first son, Theodosius, who had died so early in Barcelona. She and Athaulf had invested so much hope in the little boy, who had been given the imperial name of her father, and since his life had been cut so short, all that remained was the memory of hope and promise.

Placidia, who had money and authority to do as she pleased, sent a representative to Barcelona to exhume the baby's body and return it to Rome in its small, silver casket. She probably sent a ship from the port of Ostia, near Rome, and it could have sailed quickly across the sea to Barcelona and returned with its royal cargo. The small casket was brought to Rome, where Pope Leo officiated at the funeral to bury the child in the round sepulcher at Saint Peter's that held other members of the Theodosian family. The empress and Roman senators attended the funeral, but the chronicler did not list Valentinian as one of the attendees.[54] Perhaps he objected to his infant half-brother being buried in the family mausoleum; if he did, Placidia ignored it. Christians believed that on the day of Resurrection, those buried near Saint Peter might have an advantage in getting into heaven, and Placidia wanted to make sure her first-born joined the Theodosian family on that last day.

With this burial, Placidia had completed all she could do for all her children. Her work in this life was done, and on November 27, 450, the empress died peacefully in her sleep. There was no cause of death listed, so there had been no lingering illness to disturb her last days. She was buried with all the imperial dignity in the family mausoleum. This mausoleum became the Chapel of Saint of St.nt Petronilla in the eighth century, and later a marble sarcophagus was opened that contained two coffins made of Cyprus wood, one containing an adult and the other an infant. Perhaps Placidia was buried in the sarcophagus to spend eternity with her first-born.[55]

As the Greek playwright Sophocles wrote in his tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, "None can be called happy until that day when he carries his happiness down to the grave in peace."[56] Many Romans, Christian and pagan alike, shared this view, and by this measure, Placidia died happy with her title, her empire, and her living children sound. Best of all, she died before she could see the disasters that followed soon after her peaceful demise.

VALENTINIAN'S RULE AND THE END OF THE THEODOSIAN DYNASTY

The royal family and the city of Rome hardly had time to mourn the death of their beloved empress Placidia before a new crisis struck. Attila was ready to move again, and he repeatedly said he was going to claim Honoria as his bride. In January of 451, the Hun sent to Ravenna an envoy, who claimed, "Through me, Attila—my lord and your lord—has instructed you to prepare the palace for him."[57] With this bold statement, Attila established his demand. He did not care that Honoria was already married because he could just claim that that marriage was invalid since he was already betrothed to her.

Before Attila could move into a palace in Ravenna, he had to enter Gaul to defeat Aetius's army and secure his own flank. In the early spring of 451, he moved with his huge army west. The army left destruction in its wake, as recounted by monks and other witnesses who saw in the attack the wrath of the scourge of God. The Huns took great cities in Gaul, including Metz and even the old imperial capital of Trier.[58] In late June of 451, Halley's comet blazed across the sky, and chroniclers and theologians alike claimed that it foretold some dramatic event.[59] But the problem with such heavenly oracles was they did not predict winners or losers. The armies had to continue their preparations, and Aetius gathered the largest force he could assemble.

As the comet streaked through the sky that summer, Aetius, with a large army that included the Visigoths, finally confronted Attila's forces. This famous

engagement is known as the Battle of the Catalaunian Plain, or the Battle of Châlons, and it was the last major battle of the western empire. It was described by witnesses as "fierce, confused, monstrous, unrelenting—a fight whose like no ancient time has ever recorded," during which thirsty soldiers had to drink from a stream that was filled with blood.[60] At the end, the armies fought to a stalemate. This was the first time Attila's armies had not been victorious, and the Huns retreated back to their homeland.

Attila spent the winter preparing for his next expedition. This time he planned to go straight into Italy to claim Honoria, and he repeatedly sent demands for her. In the spring of 452, Attila broke through the passes on the eastern end of the Alps. The ancient city of Aquileia had huge defenses, but the Huns' battering rams and siege engines overcame them. The Huns plundered the city ferociously, loaded their wagons with treasure, and headed west into the lush Po valley. They were unstoppable, capturing even the old capital of Milan. Just when Italy looked lost, however, God seemed to deliver a miracle.

Valentinian, who was in Rome, sent Pope Leo with a delegation to negotiate with Attila. Attila and Leo met at the Huns' camp on the shores of Lake Benacus (now known as Lake Garda) between Venice and Milan. Leo claimed that Valentinian refused to surrender Honoria, and he threatened Attila with divine retribution if the Huns did not leave Italy. Priscus tells us that Attila's own advisors urged him to leave, reminding him that Alaric had died shortly after sacking Rome.[61] Attila stopped, and Pope Leo claimed the victory for God, reminding Romans in a subsequent sermon that God "deigned to soften the hearts of raging barbarians."[62] This event enhanced the prestige and power of the papacy for centuries.

The chronicler Hydatius, while crediting God with stopping the scourge of Attila, gave a more accurate explanation for the Huns' departure: they "were victims of divine punishment, being visited with heaven-sent disasters: famine and some kind of disease."[63] Indeed, there was suffering in the camp of the victorious Huns, as food shortages and plague led them to think longingly of home. The new strong eastern emperor Marcian also sent troops to harry the Huns, and they returned to their homeland. Before he left, Attila threatened that he would come again and do worse to Italy if Valentinian did not turn over Honoria and the half of an empire that was her due.[64]

Time ran out for Attila, however. In 453, he had taken another new bride, and on his wedding night, after drinking too much, he died in bed from some internal bleeding that left him surrounded by blood, with his young bride in fearful tears. The Huns mourned his death with a spectacular funeral, and, as Jordanes

claimed, he died "in the midst of his nation at peace, happy in his joy and without sense of pain,"[65] a surprisingly peaceful end for the Scourge of God. Attila's death ended the unified Hunnic Empire, which deteriorated in battles for his throne.

With neither her mother's protection, nor her barbarian fiancé in the picture, Honoria disappeared from the records, and she was dead before 455, perhaps at her brother's orders. Even though God had lifted his punishing scourge, no one bothered lifting the tax burden on the poor, nor reforming the justice system. However, two men gained great prestige from the withdrawal of the Huns: Pope Leo, who had turned them away from Italy, and Aetius, who had defeated them in a great battle and sent them out of Gaul. Valentinian could live with a strong pope, who complemented his imperial power, but he did not want to share power with his mother's archenemy, Aetius.

In 454, Aetius made Valentinian promise young Placidia to his son Gaudentius to ensure that Aetius's grandson would inherit the title of emperor. Aetius also cancelled Eudocia's betrothal to the Vandal Huneric, in hopes of weakening Geiseric's position. These actions show how weak Valentinian was by this date. Without his mother's support, along with her carefully cultivated alliances with strong Roman families, he could not be as certain of his supporters. He was also weakened by the death of Theodosius in the East. Pulcheria had insulted Valentinian when she appointed Marcian as emperor without consulting her relative/colleague in the West, and Valentinian could not count on support from the East any longer. At the moment, all he had was Aetius's strong right arm and a young daughter who carried the legitimacy of the Theodosian line. So, he acquiesced to Aetius's demands while he bided his time. Meanwhile, the incompetent young emperor found another way to undermine his own political base.

One of the powerful men in Rome at this time was Petronius Maximus. A wealthy man at the center of Roman cultural life, he gave lavish banquets and used his money to buy himself all the privileges of a noble Roman at court.[66] In 454, he was about sixty years old and married to a beautiful, virtuous woman. According to the chronicler Procopius, who loved to retell scandals, Valentinian had conceived a desire to seduce Maximus's wife, so he developed a plan to lure her to the palace.[67] The emperor sent her a summons, pretending it was from his wife. Once she arrived at the palace, she was shown to a small room far from the women's wing. There, Valentinian was waiting for her and raped her. She went home weeping and told her husband about the violation. Maximus conceived of a complicated plan to get his revenge.

According to Procopius, Maximus realized that he first had to get rid of the powerful Aetius if he were going to strike at Valentinian, so he conspired with

Valentinian's trusted eunuch, Heraclius, to feed the emperor's suspicion of his general. They persuaded Valentinian that Aetius was planning to take the throne, and, since the emperor was already angered that his general had forced an engagement with young Placidia, Valentinian was prepared to take action. That Valentinian was willing to trust the man whose wife he had raped might call into question his judgment, but emperors were raised to believe they could do whatever they wanted with impunity. After all, Maximus and Heraclius were simply telling him what he wanted to hear. He had long wanted to get rid of Aetius, and Attila's death had paved the way.

One of Valentinian's mistakes in the ill-conceived plan was that he decided to kill Aetius himself. On the one hand, he would get the satisfaction of personal revenge and the chance to enhance his own reputation for bravery by striking the death blow. On the other hand, he opened himself up as a target for revenge by Aetius's many followers, and he could not blame someone else for the deed. Without Placidia to advise him, he did not consider the political implications, and he armed himself and his eunuch before Aetius came to the palace to bring financial statements. On this fateful day, September 21, 454, Valentinian provoked a quarrel, accusing Aetius of treason. The emperor then drew his sword and struck Aetius several times on the head. Heraclius joined his master and stabbed Aetius repeatedly. The general was dead, and a witty Roman later commented that Valentinian had used his left hand to cut off his right.[68]

Valentinian quickly ordered Aetius's closest supporters killed. He commanded the bodies to be taken to the Forum as a warning to others who might consider treason against the emperor. He convened the Senate and listed the charges of treason against Aetius and his supporters to stem any criticism from that body. He then sent messages to the tribes, reassuring them that he was in charge even though Aetius was dead. Finally, and wisely, he sent a message to the powerful Vandal Geiseric that the marriage agreement between his daughter Eudocia and Geiseric's son Huneric was back in force.

The last thing to manage was Valentinian's own household. Maximus expected some reward for his part in the plot; he wanted to be promoted to patrician and perhaps even master of the soldiers, but Valentinian wasn't going to trade one strongman for another, and he refused. Now Maximus had another reason to claim his revenge on the emperor. Valentinian planned to rule for himself, and, to prepare for the succession, he looked to a competent general he had identified as a suitable husband for his young daughter Placidia. Meanwhile, Maximus approached two of Aetius's bodyguards to urge them to take revenge for their master's murder.

On March 16, 455, Valentinian went to the field of Mars outside the city to practice military exercises, perhaps in order to demonstrate to his troops that he was a military emperor, visible in the front lines. He was accompanied by his eunuch Heraclius. Aetius's two bodyguards seized this opportunity. One struck Valentinian on the temple and the face; the second killed Heraclius. The assassins picked up the imperial diadem and the emperor's horse and turned them over to Maximus, who was acclaimed emperor at Rome.

Valentinian was only thirty-five years old, the last of the male line of the Theodosian emperors. Maximus was smart enough to know that the strongest legitimacy for the crown lay through the dynasty of Theodosius, and that meant through the Theodosian women. As a chronicler wrote, "he was tormented by the prospect of serious rioting, which he feared would occur after he became emperor,"[69] and he looked for a way to solidify his position and secure the throne. Maximus's first wife had recently died, so he forced Valentinian's widow, Eudoxia, to marry him, much against her will. He also forced her daughter Placidia to marry his son Palladius.

Eudoxia was furious. Procopius wrote that Maximus tried to assuage her anger about her murdered husband by telling her that he had done it all out of love of her. Maximus sorely underestimated this empress if he thought romantic compliments would satisfy her. Instead, "his words made her swell with rage still more against him, and led her on to carry out her plot." Eudoxia knew that she could not seek help from the East because Marcian was now emperor, so like Placidia and Honoria before her, she looked for a champion among the barbarian leaders. She sent a message to Geiseric in North Africa, asking him to come take vengeance on Maximus.[70]

Subsequent historians have played down Eudoxia's role in Geiseric's movements after Valentinian's death, in part perhaps to avoid blaming the popular empress for the disaster that followed. Hydatius, who wrote shortly after the event, said that Geiseric moved "according to an evil lie spread by rumor that he had been summoned by Valentinian's widow."[71] Hydatius's apology shows that chroniclers as early as the fifth century knew of the invitation. Modern historians either leave out the invitation completely or follow Stewart Oost, who wrote that the story "may be rejected as basically another example of the Late Roman search for scapegoats."[72] There is actually no reason to doubt the sources who claim that Eudoxia sought revenge with the weapon so often wielded by Theodosian women—the strong arm of a barbarian with an army at his back.

The Vandal had plenty of motives to invade Italy; he didn't need an invitation from Eudoxia. He assembled a fleet and army and sailed for Rome at the

end of May, 455. Procopius says that Geiseric, "for no other reason than that he suspected that much money would come to him,"[73] sailed for Rome. In addition to money, Geiseric could avenge the insult done to him when Maximus took his son's fiancée, Eudocia, and married her to his own son in order to secure the succession. Even though Geiseric had plenty of reasons to invade, Eudoxia's invitation may well have assured him that there would not be a united resistance to his march.

The Vandals landed at Portus by the mouth of the River Tiber, marched along the Via Portuensis, and paused six miles from the city. Romans were in a panic, and many fled the city, remembering the damage done by Alaric. On May 31, Emperor Maximus mounted his horse and fled the palace, joining the mobs who were rushing to the city gates. The people recognized him, and one angry resident threw a stone that hit him in the temple. He fell from his horse, and the people cut off his head and tore apart his body, throwing the pieces into the Tiber to prevent a decent burial. Presumably, his son Palladius died at the same time.[74] Rome was now without an emperor, and its people had satisfied Eudoxia's desire for vengeance. Geiseric, however, was still on the march.

On June 2, Pope Leo met Geiseric at the Porta Portuensis to try to repeat his success with Attila at turning the barbarian away from the gates. This time he failed. The only concession he was able to gain was Geiseric's promise that there would be neither bloodshed nor burning in the city, if he was permitted to enter without resistance. It was a low point in Roman history when Geiseric was not even forced to lay siege to the great walls that surrounded the city. Instead, the Vandals strolled in and plundered the city for two weeks.

The Vandals did a much more thorough job than the Goths had done, for they took everything, stealing even bronze, like the bronze roof of the Temple of Jupiter that was covered in gold.[75] They stripped the churches and removed the sacred ornaments of the temple in Jerusalem that Emperor Titus had taken when he sacked that city back in A.D. 70. This theft is why when people in history and fiction search for the lost Ark of the Covenant, they go to North Africa, where Geiseric took his treasure, rather than Rome or the Holy Land. After two weeks of leisurely sacking the city, the ships were loaded and sailed off to North Africa. Only one ship was lost at sea, and the rest took the unimaginable treasure into the sheltered port of Carthage.

Geiseric had also claimed royal hostages—Eudoxia and her two daughters, Eudocia and Placidia. The newly widowed Eudocia was immediately married to Huneric, fulfilling the old arrangement made by their fathers, and the other two women moved into the palace and were treated with honor. While there, the

women showed the same patience that had marked Placidia's life, and they waited for opportunities to free themselves.

Eudocia produced a son, named Hilderic, sometime in about 460 or shortly thereafter. She raised him to favor Catholicism over his father's Arian faith, and when he became king late in his life, he supported Catholics and briefly improved relations with Constantinople. The emperors in Constantinople repeatedly demanded the release of the hostages, but, for seven years, Geiseric refused. Finally, in 462—perhaps because Eudocia had finally produced the grandson he so desperately wanted—he agreed that Eudoxia and Placidia could leave.

The two women did not return to Rome; instead, they sailed to Constantinople. There, in the great palace by the sea or in Galla Placidia's palace near the gates, they lived out their lives in peace. The younger Placidia had a daughter, Anicia Juliana, and through her the descendants of Galla Placidia can be traced through some generations of the eastern nobility.[76] In about 472, Eudocia was able to slip away from the palace in Carthage and caught a ship to Jerusalem. There she passed the rest of her life in peace and prayer.

Galla Placidia presided over the Roman Empire for forty years as two crucial developments shaped the future of the West: Barbarian tribes slowly dismembered the old empire, and the Catholic church took over, offering a cohesive body of ideas that would hold the West together in an entity that for the next thousand years was called "Christendom." Placidia was pious, practical, patient, and politically astute as she put her hand to shaping the events of the day. When she was kidnapped by a barbarian, she envisioned a new kind of synthesis between the two peoples. When her rule was threatened by strong generals, she carefully played them against each other to preserve her dynasty. When competing religious ideas seemed to threaten the unity of the church, she followed her father's example, for better or worse, and threw the power of the State behind the church to enforce the newly emerging ideas. When people today admire the magnificent mosaics in Ravenna, they can look with wonder at the glowing Christian Empire that Placidia envisioned, where God was on the side of Rome.

The Fall of the Western Empire

455–476

The traditional date for the end of the western half of the Roman Empire is 476, a mere twenty-six years after Placidia's death. In reality, the unified empire crumbled with the death of Placidia's son Valentinian in 455; it just didn't know it yet. Under the reign of Placidia and her son, only two things held the western empire together: (1) the idea that it was ruled and blessed by the House of Theodosius, and (2) the exorbitant taxes that paid for armies, an elaborate court, and church buildings. People were already complaining about the taxes during Placidia's reign, and the death of Valentinian eliminated the dynasty.

As had been true for centuries, the death of an emperor led to a proliferation of new candidates for the purple. Between Valentinian's death and 476, there were nine emperors, none strong enough to establish a dynasty. In addition, none of them were able to extend his rule beyond Italy, though two, Majorian (456–461) and Anthemius (467–472), tried to retake North Africa from the Vandals and failed spectacularly. The old warrior, Geiseric, was too smart and too strong to lose his prize territory. The eastern emperor, Leo I, in 472 tried to reestablish the Theodosian dynasty by sending the younger Placidia's husband, Olybrius, west to be emperor. Olybrius lasted less than a year, dying in Rome. Wisely, Placidia did not join her husband in this Roman adventure, but she stayed with her little daughter in Constantinople, away from the trouble in the West.

The end of the western empire came rather undramatically in 476 with the invasion of Italy by Odovacar, another strong Germanic general with an army of barbarians. Since he lacked gold, he rewarded his army with land in Italy, where they settled, as so many barbarians similarly had settled down in Spain, Gaul, Britain, and North Africa. Then, Odovacar turned his attention to the ruling emperor, the teenaged Romulus Augustus, known as Augustulus, "little

Augustus." Unlike previous barbarian generals, Odovacar was not interested in being the power behind this boy's throne, and he came up with a politically astute solution. He deposed Augustulus, not even bothering to kill him, which shows what a small threat this emperor posed. Odovacar then sent the imperial regalia—the purple cloak and diadem—back to the eastern emperor, claiming to have reunited the empire at last. In response, the eastern emperor Zeno made a virtue of necessity by giving Odovacar the title of patrician and the authority to administer Italy in his name.

The barbarian tribes who had slowly splintered the western empire from the time of Theodosius had now completed the job. The western Roman Empire had been replaced by kingdoms of Visigoths, Vandals, Franks, Anglo-Saxons, and others, and the medieval age had come. The Roman Empire in the West had fallen.

There has been much ink spilled about the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire. Ancient historians like Polybius liked to blame moral decadence (orgies, wild parties, birth control) for the disintegration of the cohesive state. It is tempting to cite lazy immorality when we contemplate Emperor Honorius and his court, but that argument falls apart when we consider that his brother Arcadius was equally depraved, and the eastern empire stood for another thousand years after him. The eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon blamed the rise of Christianity, with its attendant disputes (like the struggles over the incarnation) that fragmented society and distracted leaders from solving more worldly problems. This argument falls apart largely for the same reason Polybius's does: the eastern empire survived just fine amid theological squabbling and otherworldly preoccupations.

I'm going to break a bit with traditional dismissals of Gibbon's argument and apportion at least a small part of the decline of the empire to the adoption of Christianity. The moment Placidia's father, Theodosius the Great, credited his victories not to his strong arm but to God's blessings, the military leadership of the empire was weakened. Romans wanted their emperors to have God on their side, a desire that opened the way for weak emperors like Honorius and Arcadius to keep power. It also allowed women to rule, including Placidia in the West and Pulcheria in the East. The lack of an emperor with military skill introduced the need for strong, loyal generals, political savvy, a lot of luck, and perhaps the occasional miracle. However, even this inherent military weakness did not bring down the eastern empire.

The transition from the dynasty of Theodosius in the eastern empire took a different turn, based on the wisdom of the last Theodosian empress in the East.

In 450, when Theodosius II died, his sister Empress Pulcheria made a decision about the succession that departed from the tradition of maintaining the blessed Theodosian bloodline that Galla Placidia had worked so hard to preserve. Pulcheria valued her virginity more than the Theodosian dynasty, and she selected a strong general, Marcian, to be her (chaste) husband. In the East, once again, the significant criteria for the imperial purple lay in the strong arm of the emperor. It may be that the western empire would have come to this solution in time, but other influences in the West intervened. While the East stood strong behind the great Theodosian walls, the West was vulnerable. So, although the notion of a divine emperor weakened the West, in the end, the western portion did not fall, it was pushed down.

The waves of Germanic tribes that swept into the empire through the late fourth and early fifth centuries overwhelmed Roman resources.[1] Peter Heather has convincingly demonstrated that it was not just their numbers that mattered but the fact that the barbarians learned about centralization and large-scale military organization from the Romans.[2] This blending of cultures places Placidia once more in the center of this story. Her father had begun the accommodation of the barbarians as he negotiated, used them in his armies, and settled them within the empire. Placidia continued his policies, and they were given a boost as she traveled with the Visigoths and married Athaulf. She suggested the possibility of a new empire—a union of Goth and Roman based in law—that might transform the old Rome, and her longing for her first son at the end of her life might show that she revisited that dream. The union of peoples seemed to have failed with the death of Athaulf and little Theodosius, but it really didn't.

The Visigoths and the other tribes who settled down implemented that dream on their own. They created kings and the idea of kingship. They combined Roman laws with their own traditions and learned to speak Latin instead of Gothic. In time, they even abandoned Arian Christianity in favor of Catholic orthodoxy. While they held on tenaciously to their trousers, soap, and ideals of heroic battles, they adopted much that was Roman. In fact, as early medieval society showed, more of Rome survived than fell. Indeed, all that was lost of Placidia's vision was a huge, unified empire, which by the fifth century was more a dream than a reality anyway.

Placidia's influence extended well into the modern world through her patronage of the church. Her involvement in the great religious controversies of her day helped shape the development of the Catholic Church. Perhaps the most obvious example lay in the discussions of the incarnation; the presence of strong empresses in both halves of the empire helped lift the status of the Virgin Mary

to "Mother of God," and churches grew up dedicated to Mary. The great church of Maria Maggiore in Rome showed the Virgin Mary as an empress (see fig. 6.1), resembling the dark-eyed, regal Placidia, draped in pearls, who graced the throne in Ravenna. During her reign, certain holidays took on new importance on the church calendar, and there was growing veneration of the jeweled relics that would grace medieval churches. In fact, the very medieval concept of Christendom emerged during the reign of the Theodosians.

After 476, although the Roman Empire in the West had fallen, Placidia's city of Ravenna remained for centuries a capital for conquerors, and her patronage of mosaics exerted an influence on subsequent rulers. Each new ruler in Ravenna added his own churches with brilliant mosaics, for just as Placidia demonstrated, the most effective sign of power in the ancient world was to create that which could be seen and admired.[3] The sixth-century Ostrogoth (East Goth) ruler of Italy, Theodoric, built (among other things) an Arian baptistery with golden mosaics that showed the power and religious toleration of the Arian Goths. When Justinian, the seventh-century eastern emperor, reconquered Italy, he, too, sent his artists to build churches in Ravenna. The greatest of that time was San Vitale, which includes magnificent portrayals of the Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora, resplendent in their purple, gold, and pearls, claiming the same divine kingship that Placidia had insisted upon. Justinian's architects noticed how the dome of Placidia's Holy Cross church seemed to float, an effect achieved by using pendentives. This architectural concept must have been brought back to Constantinople, for it was used in building the great church of Hagia Sophia, which served as a model for subsequent Muslim architecture.[4] Many of these works of art still stand, influencing people's views of God, power, and imperial kingship. They serve as a final and fitting memorial to an empress who held power against all odds and claimed that she ruled because God was on her side. Her influence on church and state extends far beyond people's memories of this extraordinary woman.

During Galla Placidia's life, the old Roman Empire was transformed and the new kingdoms of Christendom were born. Many ideas and customs that we practice today—from high theology to the use of soap and the wearing of trousers—come from those tumultuous times, and these changes came about as part of a complex pattern of events, people, choices, and luck. Placidia was at the center of this design, and while she did not control all the elements, her presence influenced the way things turned out. It is worth tracing the wisps of historical evidence in buildings, laws, and letters to restore this influential woman to the center of the story. There, she reigned as brightly as the shining mosaics she loved.

Notes

INTRODUCTION: A Forgotten Empress

1. I had the opportunity to reflect deeply on this question when I wrote *Encyclopedia of Women in the Ancient World*.
2. See Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*.
3. See, e.g., Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, or the many patristic works.
4. In this I follow, as I have done throughout my career, the pathbreaking work of Fernand Braudel. See, e.g., Braudel's *The Mediterranean*.
5. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 310.
6. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*.
7. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*.

CHAPTER 1: The "Most Noble" Princess

1. Williams and Friell, *Theodosius*, 35.
2. See Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*.
3. *The Theodosian Code*, 6.6.1, p. 127.
4. Claudian, "Panegyric on the Fourth Consulship of the Emperor Honorius" (cited hereafter as IV Cons.), in *Claudian*, 5.
5. Claudian, IV Cons., 12.
6. Gregory of Nyssa, "Funeral Oration for the Empress Flaccilla."
7. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 47.
8. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 53.
9. Claudian, IV Cons., 4–5.
10. Chrysostom, *Homily on Ps 48*, in Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 139.
11. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 151.
12. Sozomenus, "Ecclesiastical History," 392.
13. Claudian, IV Cons., 6.
14. Claudian, IV Cons., 6.
15. Claudian, IV Cons., 7–11.
16. Claudian, IV Cons., 10.
17. Ayalon, *Eunuchs, Caliphs, and Sultans*, 14.
18. Claudian, IV Cons., 11.
19. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 50.
20. Claudian, "Against Eutropius," in "Texts," 147.

21. Chrysostom, *Homily on Ps 48*, in Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 139.
22. Williams and Friell, *Theodosius*, 48.
23. Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 60.
24. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*.
25. "The First Ecumenical Council," in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, 3.
26. Sozomenus, "Ecclesiastical History," 379.
27. *Theodosian Code*, 16.1.1, p. 440.
28. Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 355.
29. Ambrose, *Saint Ambrose: Letters*, 33.
30. See Salisbury, *Blood of Martyrs*, 9–12, for the account of this persecution.
31. Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 86.
32. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 47.
33. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 32–36.
34. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 175.
35. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 145.
36. Jerome, "Letter 22, To Eustocium," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 6:23.
37. Justin Martyr, "Apology," 186.
38. Ambrose, "Hymns."
39. Ambrose, "The Sacraments," in *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works*, 304–5.
40. Ambrose, "The Sacraments," 314.
41. Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust*, 16–17.
42. Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust*, 15.
43. Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust*, 23.
44. Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust*, 31.
45. Augustine, *Confessions*, 159.
46. Augustine, *Confessions*, 190.
47. Ambrose, *Funeral Orations*, 309.
48. Sozomenus, "Ecclesiastical History," 392.
49. Sozomenus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 393.
50. Ambrose, *Funeral Orations*, 310.

CHAPTER 2: Orphan Princess in Stilicho's Shadow

1. Hughes, *Stilicho*, 33.
2. Hughes, *Stilicho*, 8.
3. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 353.
4. Hughes, *Stilicho*, 80–85, convincingly details the events in the Balkans, though his analysis is by no means universally accepted. See Cameron, *Claudian*, 159–78, for a counter view that blames Stilicho for incompetence.
5. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 112.
6. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 113.
7. Cameron, *Claudian*, 91.
8. "Nazarius and Celsus," in Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers*, 2:99.
9. "Nazarius and Celsus," in Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers*, 2:99.
10. See Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 9–30, for the history of martyrdom.

11. Jerome, "Letter CVII," in *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, 189–95.
12. Claudian, "Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria," in "Texts."
13. Claudian, "Poem 48," in *Claudian*, 2:243. See also Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 64.
14. Zosimus frequently accuses Greeks of treachery. See Hughes, *Stilicho*, 92.
15. Casson, "Speed Under Sail of Ancient Ships," 136–48.
16. Hughes, *Stilicho*, 100.
17. Claudian, "Panegyric on the Fourth Consulship of the Emperor Honorius," in *Claudian*, in "Texts."
18. Rousselle, *Porneia*, 33.
19. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 17–20.
20. Claudian, "Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria," in "Texts."
21. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, offers the fullest description of the rituals, which are confirmed by Claudian.
22. Hughes, *Stilicho*, 118.
23. Claudian, "On the Consulship of Stilicho," *http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Claudian/De_Consulatu_Stilichonis/2*.html* in "Texts."
24. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 137.
25. Claudian, "The Gothic War," in "Texts."
26. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 349; Claudian, "The Gothic War," in "Texts." See also Hughes, *Stilicho*, 141.
27. Claudian, "Panegyric on the Sixth Consulship of the Emperor Honorius," in "Texts."
28. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 75.
29. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 170, note 2.
30. Cameron, *Claudian*, 418.
31. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 352.
32. Celsus, *Celsus*, 87, 118.
33. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 350.
34. Hughes, *Stilicho*, 39.
35. Prudentius, "Against Symmachus," in *The Poems of Prudentius*, 116.
36. Prudentius, "Against Symmachus," 162.
37. See Solmsen, "The Powers of Darkness in Prudentius 'Contra Symmachum.'"
38. Zosimus, *New History*, book 5.
39. See Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, 89–96, for an analysis of this life.
40. *The Life of Melania the Younger*, 85–90.
41. *The Life of Melania the Younger*, 33–37.
42. Hughes, *Stilicho*, 177.
43. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 79.
44. The debate is well summarized in Hughes, *Stilicho*, 199–200.
45. Zosimus, *New History*, book 5.
46. Zosimus, *New History*, book 5.
47. Zosimus, *New History*, book 5.
48. Zosimus, *New History*, book 5. See Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 85–86, for the summary of all the arguments.

49. Zosimus, *New History*, book 5.

50. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 353.

CHAPTER 3: Held Hostage by the Goths

1. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 198.

2. Heather and Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century*, 59–89.

3. I am assuming the wagons were about ten feet long and three-and-a-half feet wide. Anything larger would be difficult for two oxen to pull and too cumbersome for mountain passes.

4. Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, 423–24.

5. This account follows Zosimus, *New History*, books 5 and 6, 8–10.

6. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 226, and Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, 158, both argue that Sarus's actions might have been more of a personal vendetta rather than a cohesive military action.

7. Jerome, "Letter 127," in *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, 257.

8. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 81–88.

9. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 96; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 111–19.

10. Pelagius, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 213.

11. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger*, 38.

12. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 184.

13. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 353–55.

14. Jerome, "Letter 127," in *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, 257.

15. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger*, 42–43.

16. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 356.

17. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 66.

18. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, books 3 and 4, 96–104.

19. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 355.

20. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 356.

21. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 101.

22. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger*, 41–43

23. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 101.

24. Herodotus describes the Scythians using hemp seeds in this way. Herodotus, *History*, http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.4.iv.html. A large bag of marijuana was found in an Indo-European burial site in the Gobi desert from almost 5,000 years ago. See, e.g., http://dsc.discovery.com/news/slideshows/marijuana-stash.html.

25. "Passion of St. Saba the Goth" in Heather and Matthews, *Goths in the Fourth Century*, 111–17.

26. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 27.

27. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, 90.

28. Jordanes, *Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, chap. xxx. He also gives the account of the burial beneath the riverbed.

29. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 103.

30. Tacitus, "Germania."

31. Jordanes, *Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, chap. xxx.

32. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 361–62.

33. Jordanes, *Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, chap. xxx.

34. Tacitus, "Germania."
35. Jerome, "Commentary in Ezechial, Book 3," in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 206–7.
36. Jerome, "Commentary in Ezechial, Book 3, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 208.
37. Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 231–32.
38. *The Theodosian Code*, 16.5.37, 16.5.38, 16.5.39, p. 456.
39. *The Theodosian Code*, 16.2.31, 16.5.46, p. 445–46, 458.
40. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 330.
41. Jerome, "Commentary in Ezechial, Book 3," in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 206.
42. Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 277.
43. *The Theodosian Code*, 16.5.52, p. 459.
44. Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 288.
45. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 361–62.
46. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 363.
47. Claudian, "In Praise of Serena," in "Texts," 243.
48. Sozomenus, "Ecclesiastical History," 422–23.
49. Augustine, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini*. I have summarized the text.
50. See Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 302–4, for the importance of these refugees to the development of Augustine's thought.
51. Augustine, "Letter 136," in *Saint Augustine: Letters 131–164*, 17.
52. Augustine, *City of God*, 5.
53. Augustine, *City of God*, vi, preface, 225.
54. Augustine, *City of God*, xviii, 1, 761.
55. Desmond Tutu in a lecture on Semester at Sea, *MV Explorer*, April 2006.
56. Salisbury "In Vain Have I Smitten Your Children, " 211.
57. Augustine, "Letters of Petilian," in *Writings Against the Manichaeans*, 539.

CHAPTER 4: Queen of the Visigoths

1. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 185.
2. Polybius, *Histories*, 3.53–54.
3. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 87.
4. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 79. Also, see Sozomenus, "Ecclesiastical History," 426.
5. Jerome, "Letter 130," in *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, 264.
6. Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 293.
7. Augustine, "Letter 151," in *Saint Augustine: Letters 131–164*, 270.
8. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 337–39.
9. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 86.
10. See www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/health_and_medicine.htm for detailed accounts of Viking medicine taken from the sagas.
11. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 362.
12. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 86.
13. See Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 14–15, for an excellent summary of the research on provincial villas, including those in Narbonne.
14. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 88.
15. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 129.
16. Tacitus, "Germania."

17. See Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 17–34, for a detailed description of traditional wedding songs.

18. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 88.

19. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 362.

20. Jerome, "Against Jovinian," in *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, 359.

21. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, 39–55.

22. Augustine, "The Good of Marriage," in *Saint Augustine: Treatises*, 22.

23. Augustine, "On Adulterous Marriages," *in Saint Augustine: Treatises*, 61.

24. See Karl Heidecker, *The Divorce of Lothar II*.

25. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 89.

26. Hydatius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 83.

27. Hydatius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 83.

28. See Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, 102–3, for an analysis showing that they did not draw lots or gamble for the land.

29. Hydatius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 83.

30. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 358.

31. Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities*, 159.

32. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 209; Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, 236.

33. "Council of Elvira," Canon #33.

34. Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities*, 219–20.

35. Backman, *Religious Dances*, 95.

36. Aherne, *Valerio of Bierzo*, 86–78, 90. See also Salisbury, *Iberian Popular Religion*, for an analysis of the importance of social rituals in the early church.

37. See Prudentius, *Poems*.

38. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 4.

39. See Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 295.

40. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 356.

41. Bell, *Fate and Honor*, 51–55.

42. This description is drawn from French, "Midwives and Maternity Care in the Roman World," who summarizes Soranus's text.

43. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 90.

44. Beltrán de Heredia Bercero and Bonnet, *From Barcino to Barcinona*, 74, describes the construction of the baptistery.

45. Akeley, *Christian Initiation in Spain*. See Salisbury, *Iberian Popular Religion*, 271–72, for the baptism rituals.

46. Bell, *Fate and Honor*, 35–42, gives the figures and the sensitive analysis of the reasons for the deaths.

47. Sales Carbonell, "Teodosi," 53–97.

48. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 90. See Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 51–56, for typical funeral and mourning ceremonies.

49. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 91. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 134–35.

50. http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/health_and_medicine.htm.

51. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 91.

52. Salisbury, *Iberian Popular Religion*, 61.

53. Gregory, Bishop of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 68.
54. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 91.
55. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 91.
56. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 362.
57. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 95.
58. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 96.

CHAPTER 5: Wife and Mother in Ravenna

1. Strabo, v.1.7.
2. Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs*, 136–37.
3. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 32–33.
4. Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs*, 118.
5. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 86–87; Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs*, 118.
6. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 85.
7. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 57–59.
8. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 142.
9. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 99.
10. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 140–42; Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 61–67.
11. Soranus 2, 12, 19, in Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 379.
12. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 162.
13. Clark, trans., *The Life of Melania the Younger*, 28.
14. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 98.
15. There is no consensus about when the church was built. Some argue for 417, others for 425. Since Placidia built another large church in 425, I prefer the earlier date for Santa Croce. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 73–74.
16. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 70–84.
17. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 163–65. Krautheimer claims the origins of pendentives are obscure but credits the sixth-century architects of Hagia Sophia with their perfection. Yet, we can show that builders from Constantinople visited Ravenna shortly before beginning construction on Hagia Sophia, so they could not help but be influenced by Placidia's beautiful floating dome.
18. Agnellus, *The Book of Pontiffs*, 150.
19. Agnelllus, *The Book of Pontiffs*, 149–50.
20. See Deliyannis, "Bury Me in Ravenna?" 289–99, for a fine discussion of how this building came to be associated with Placidia's burial place.
21. Augustine, "Letter 177," in *Saint Augustine: Letters 165–203*, 94–108.
22. "Codex Canonum," in *Imperial Laws and Letters*, 17.
23. Augustine, "Letter 202," from Honorius, in *Saint Augustine: Letters 165–203*, 404.
24. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 343. See Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, for a modern advocacy of Pelagianism.
25. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, 45.
26. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 385.
27. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 101.
28. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 156.
29. This account follows Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 157.

30. Agnellus, *The Book of Pontiffs*, 34–35.
31. The best translations of Placidia's letters are in Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 75–77.
32. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 76.
33. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 75.
34. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 78.
35. "Imperial Laws and Letters."
36. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 102.
37. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 87.
38. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 87.
39. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 106.
40. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 106.
41. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 104.
42. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 100.
43. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 164.
44. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 105, recounts this incident.
45. *The Theodosian Code*, 9.16.11, p. 251.
46. Salisbury, *Iberian Popular Religion*, 246–47.
47. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 105.
48. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 100.
49. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 107.
50. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 172–73, offers a clear summary of these events.
51. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 107, lists these resources.
52. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 110.
53. Augustine, "Letter 189," in *Saint Augustine: Letters 165–203*, 270.
54. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 170, argues this.
55. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 107.
56. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 176; Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 89,
57. Agnellus, *The Book of Pontiffs*, 151.
58. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 107.
59. *The Theodosian Code*, 16.5.59, 461.
60. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 70–112, brilliantly analyzes her career.
61. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 92.
62. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 164.
63. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 97.
64. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 114.
65. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 178.
66. These events were recounted by Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 165–66, and Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 108–9.
67. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1:538.

CHAPTER 6: Empress of the Romans

1. The account of this war is taken from Olympiodorus in Christopher Chaffin, *Olympiodorus of Thebes and the Sack of Rome*, 113–16, and Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 165–66.
2. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 114.
3. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 115.

4. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 166.
5. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 166.
6. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 193.
7. Unless otherwise noted, the following account of the Huns' daily life comes from Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 411–12.
8. Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, 491.
9. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 148–50, gives the best summary of the possible origins of the Huns.
10. Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, 505–6.
11. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 157. Heather's fine analysis of the bow informs both these paragraphs on the Hunnic innovation, 154–57.
12. Ammianus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 412.
13. Ammianus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 412.
14. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 281.
15. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 116.
16. Olympiodorus, in Chaffin, *Olympiodorus*, 116.
17. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 282.
18. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 156
19. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 210.
20. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, plate 7.
21. Christie, "The City Walls of Ravenna," 113–38.
22. *The Theodosian Code*, 10.10.33, p. 279.
23. *The Theodosian Code*, 10.10.33, p. 279. See also Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 216, for an analysis of this edict.
24. *The Theodosian Code*, 6.2.25, p. 119–20; Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 216.
25. *The Theodosian Code*, 5.1.7, p. 105–7.
26. *The Theodosian Code*, 11.30.68, p. 332; Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 219.
27. *The Theodosian Code* 1.4.3, p. 15.
28. *The Theodosian Code*, 15.
29. *The Theodosian Code*, xvii.
30. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 220.
31. See Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 63–70, for a description of this church.
32. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 274.
33. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 274–75.
34. Agnellus, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 151.
35. Smith, "The Side Chambers," 86–97.
36. Peter Chrysologus, *Saint Peter Chrysologus*, 5. See also Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 266.
37. Agnellus, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 124.
38. Smith, "The Side Chambers," 92.
39. Agnellus, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 149.
40. *The Theodosian Code*, 16.5.63, p. 462. Law issued in August 425.
41. *The Theodosian Code*, 16.5.65, p. 462–63.
42. *The Theodosian Code*, 15.5.5, p. 433.
43. Augustine, "Letter 55," in *Saint Augustine: Letters*, 1–82, 287.

44. *The Theodosian Code*, 15.5.5, p. 433.
45. Augustine, "Letter 55," in *Saint Augustine: Letters*, 1–82, 288.
46. Peter Chrysologus, "Sermon 155," in *Saint Peter Chrysologus*, 264.
47. Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, 114.
48. Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, 154.
49. Augustine, "Letter 55," in *Saint Augustine: Letters* 1–82, 260–61.
50. Leo the Great, "Sermon 27," in "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 140–41.
51. Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 7–21.
52. Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 50.
53. Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 81–82.
54. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*.
55. Ambrose, *De viginibus*, in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 191.
56. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 169.
57. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 169.
58. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 153.
59. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 170.
60. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 172.
61. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 155.
62. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 236.
63. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 161.
64. Peter Chrysologus, "Sermon 141," in *Saint Peter Chrysologus*, 240–41.
65. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 165.
66. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 170.
67. Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust*, 40–41.
68. See Sieger, "Visual Metaphor as Theology," 83–91.
69. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 211.
70. Augustine, "Letter 189," in *Saint Augustine: Letters*, 165–203, 270
71. Augustine, "Letter 220," in *Saint Augustine: Letters*, 204–270, 104.
72. Augustine, "Letter 220," in *Saint Augustine: Letters*, 204–270, 105–7.
73. Augustine, "Letter 220," in *Saint Augustine: Letters*, 204–270, 107.
74. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 107–8.
75. Augustine, "Letter 229," in *Saint Augustine: Letters* 204–270, 152.
76. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 229.
77. *The Theodosian Code*, 9.40.24, p. 258.
78. Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, 662.
79. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 3.14–17, pp. 178–86.
80. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 268–72, has the best analysis of the crossing, and my account is drawn from here.
81. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 470.
82. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 470.
83. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 3–4.
84. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 4–5.
85. Augustine, "Letter 228," in *Saint Augustine: Letters* 204–270, 144, 146.
86. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 19.
87. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 431–32.
88. Augustine, *Retractions*, 4–5.

89. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 433.

90. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 231.

91. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 233.

92. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 91–92.

93. Clark, *Life of Melania*, 65–68. See Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 183–84, for Eudocia's dissatisfaction with life at court and her eagerness to depart. Holum suggests that Volusian died in 438, after the wedding, but most scholars prefer the earlier date.

94. Clark, *Life of Melania*, 68.

95. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 178.

96. Socrates, "Ecclesiastical History," 177; Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 244.

97. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 245; Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 124. Sivan makes an interesting argument that Placidia commissioned a highly illustrated Old Testament book with images of particular significance to women as a gift for her new daughter-in-law (128–34). There is not enough evidence for me to agree with the conclusion.

CHAPTER 7: The Empress Mother and Her Children

1. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 270.

2. Bury, "Justa Grata Honoria," 9. See also Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 267.

3. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 254, traced the amount of time Valentinian spent in Rome by looking at the location indicated on the legislation he promulgated. Oost's research shows that he spent at least a portion of almost every year in Rome from 438 through 450.

4. As mentioned by Sidonius, "Poem 23," in *Poems and Letters*, 1:299.

5. Procopius, in Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 175.

6. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 250.

7. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 258.

8. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 247–48.

9. Leo the Great, "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 115.

10. Leo the Great, "Letter 1," in "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 1.

11. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 252–53.

12. This account is drawn from Constantius of Lyons, "The Life of St. Germanus of Auxerre," 311–20.

13. Flavius Merobaudes, "Carmina 2," in "Flavius Merobaudes," 11.

14. Merobaudes, "Panegyric 1," in "Flavius Merobaudes," 12.

15. Quodvultdeus, "In Barbarian Times," quoted in Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 289.

16. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 7.

17. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 6–8.

18. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 289–90; Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 259–60.

19. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 290.

20. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 290.

21. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 290.

22. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 7. See also Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 292–93.

23. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 261.

24. Merobaudes, "Carmina 1," in "Flavius Merobaudes," 11. I concur with Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 260, and Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 293, who argue that this mosaic portrays Huneric as the "exile." Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 122–23, suggests that it shows Valentinian as a weeping exile at the court of Theodosius II, and this is not compelling to me.

25. Merobaudes, "Panegyric 2," in "Flavius Merobaudes," 14. I take Heather's interpretation of the phrase; see Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 298.

26. Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, 722. Jordanes took this description from Priscus.

27. Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, 728.

28. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 301–2.

29. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 300–301.

30. Priscus, "Priscus at the Court of Attila."

31. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 313–25, details this complicated plot.

32. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, plate 24.

33. Salvian, *The Writings of Salvian*, 147.

34. Priscus, "Priscus at the Court of Attila."

35. Salvian, *The Writings of Salvian*, 202.

36. Gregory, Bishop of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 26.

37. Kelly, *The End of Empire*, 1761.

38. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 153–54, reproduces a translation of the text from John of Antioch and Priscus that describes this incident. Bury, "Justa Grata Honoria," offers the fullest account of this event.

39. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 335.

40. Rouselle, *Porneia*, 44–45.

41. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 153. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 283–84, plays down this gesture as an offer of marriage, suggesting that Attila misunderstood. This interpretation simply attempts to reduce Honoria's responsibility; I think there is no doubt she intended marriage.

42. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 290.

43. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 153–54.

44. Leo the Great, "Letter 56," in "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 58.

45. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 764–66, lays out the complex Christology.

46. Leo the Great, "Letter 34," in "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 47.

47. Peter Chrysologus, "Letter to Eutyches," in *Saint Peter Chrysologus*, 285–86.

48. Leo the Great, "Letter 28," in "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 38–43. Quoted passage on page 39.

49. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 768.

50. Leo the Great, "Letters 55 to 58," in "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 57. Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 138.

51. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 255, and Sivan, *Galla Placidia*, 139.

52. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 771.

53. Leo the Great, "Letter 56," in "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 58.

54. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 291.

55. It is certain that she is not buried in Ravenna in what has come to be called the "Mausoleum of Galla Placidia." See Deliyannis, "Bury Me in Ravenna?" 289–99.

56. Sophocles, *King Oedipus*, 68.

57. Kelly, *The End of Empire*, 3093 (Kindle). Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 335, plays down Honoria's role in drawing Attila to the West instead of to Persia, but there is no evidence for that. Attila claimed he was coming for his bride, and the legitimacy of marriage to a member of the Theodosian family would have been irresistible.

58. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 337–42, gives the most detailed account of Attila's battles between 451 and 453, and my retelling follows his analysis.

59. Hydatius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 101–2.

60. Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, 207, 812–19. Also see Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 339.

61. Bury, *History of the Late Roman Empire*, 295, n. 3.

62. Leo the Great, "Sermon 44," in "Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great," 197.

63. Hydatius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 103.

64. Bury, *History of the Late Roman Empire*, 296.

65. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 342.

66. Sidonius, quoted by Bury, *History of the Late Roman Empire*, 299.

67. This account follows Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 224–32. Some historians dismiss this account of seduction (see Bury, *History of the Late Roman Empire*, 300), but it is not improbable.

68. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 239; Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 301–3.

69. Hydatius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 105.

70. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 263–70.

71. Hydatius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius*, 105.

72. Bury, *History of the Late Roman Empire*, and Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, don't mention it. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 305.

73. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 265.

74. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 270; Oost *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 306.

75. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 278; Oost *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 306.

76. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, 307.

EPILOGUE

1. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 443–59, summarizes the arguments for the fall, and concludes that the barbarian invasions brought down the western empire.

2. Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, 459.

3. See Miles, "The Evidence of Our Eyes," 41–62.

4. There has been much controversy over the origins of the pendentives in Hagia Sophia, but most credit Justinian's architects without noticing the obvious debt to Placidia's church. See Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 163.

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